SECRET AVENGERS®

FEAR ITSELF™

SPENCER BUNN EATON NGUYEN

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WITH SIN TIGHTENING HER GRIP ON THE EASTERN SEABOARD, STEVE ROGERS' BLACK-OPS AVENGERS TAKE TO THE FRONT LINES OF *FEAR ITSELF!*

War Machine, Ant-Man and Beast defend Washington, D.C. from Sin's Blitzkrieg U.S.A. The immortal Valkyrie leads a squad of mortal soldiers into battle in war-ravaged Manhattan. And Black Widow fights for the honor of her lover — Bucky Barnes, a casualty of the war against the Worthy — both at home and abroad. Each harrowing encounter leads the Secret Avengers closer to the truth behind Fear Itself. Plus: The Secret Avengers race against the clock to save hundreds of confidential government sources from certain death!

Collecting *Secret Avengers #12.1* and *#13-15*, written by NICK SPENCER (*Ultimate Comics X-Men*) and illustrated by SCOT EATON (*Iron Man/Thor*), and *Fear Itself: Black Widow*, by CULLEN BUNN and PETER NGUYEN.

"I COMMEND (NICK SPENCER'S) METHOD OF STORYTELLING FOR ITS UNCANNY ABILITY TO MAKE ME ENJOY THE BOOK MORE AS I READ ON AND ACTUALLY HAVE ME WANT TO READ AN ISSUE A SECOND TIME DIRECTLY AFTERWARDS. THAT'S AN ACCOMPLISHMENT."
— Dan Iverson, *IGN.com*

"SCOT EATON'S STUFF IS REALLY, REALLY GOOD...(HIS) CHARACTERS ARE SCARY, TOUGH, SEXY AND EXCITING TO WATCH."
— *AComicBookBlog.com*

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SPENCER EATON MENDOZA D'ARMATA

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EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES, UNITED AGAINST A COMMON THREAT! ON THAT DAY THE AVENGERS WERE BORN, TO FIGHT FOES THAT NO SINGLE HERO COULD WITHSTAND!

SECRET AVENGERS

BROUGHT TOGETHER AS A BLACK OPS UNIT BY FORMER CAPTAIN AMERICA STEVE ROGERS TO TAKE ON THE WORLD'S BIGGEST THREATS, WAR MACHINE, MOON KNIGHT, BEAST, ANT-MAN, BLACK WIDOW, VALKYRIE AND SHARON CARTER ARE THE SECRET AVENGERS.

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A SWISS FORT KNOX.

JUST OUTSIDE GSTAAD, SWITZERLAND.

PLEASE--

PLEASE-- DON'T DO THIS-- I HAVE A DAUGHTER--

JUST-- JUST TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT...

WHAT DO I *WANT?*

ALL OF IT.

EAST WILLIAMSBURG, BROOKLYN.

ONE HOUR LATER.

KNOCK KNOCK

KNOCK
KNOCK
KNOCK

HOLD ON A DAMN SECOND! WHAT THE HELL DO YOU--

MISTER NEGATIVE!

HELLO, FRANKLIN. I HOPE THIS ISN'T A BAD TIME.

HUH? OH, NO, NOT AT ALL--

I GUESS YOU'RE HERE ABOUT THE GAUNTLETS, YEAH?

ARE THEY READY?

I HAD TO PULL DOUBLE TIME TO GET THEM ON THE SCHEDULE YOU NEEDED, BUT I GOT 'EM--

WELL, I CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH FOR THAT. MOST IMPRESSIVE. GOOD WEAPONS SPECIALISTS ARE TOUGH TO FIND THESE DAYS. I BLAME THE ECONOMY.

AW, NO WORRIES, YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I LOVE THIS STUFF--

CHECK IT OUT, STOLE THE DESIGN FROM SOME KID IN L.A.!

MM. MAGNIFICENT. AS ALWAYS, REALLY. JUST PERFECT.

YOU KNOW, THOUGH, FRANKLIN, I WORRY ABOUT YOU SOMETIMES. YOU WORK TOO HARD, I THINK-- YOU DON'T GET ENOUGH REST.

AW, I'M DOIN' ALL RIGHT, BOSS--

OH, SURE. ***SURE YOU ARE.*** BUT STILL, IT'S AN OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD FOR THOSE OF US THAT ENJOY WHAT WE DO SO PASSIONATELY.

YOU HAVE TO KNOW WHEN TO RELAX. JUST LAY BACK, PERHAPS WATCH SOME TELEVISION?

THAT? CRAP JUST ROTS YOUR BRAIN, I TOLD 'EM TO GET IT OUT OF HERE--

WELL NOW, THAT'S A VERY NARROW POINT OF VIEW, FRANKLIN.

THERE'RE MANY INTERESTING PROGRAMS OUT THERE THESE DAYS--

YOU SHOULD AT LEAST CHECK TO SEE WHAT'S ON.

LIVE

--GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ARE SCRAMBLING TONIGHT IN THE WAKE OF A MASSIVE LEAK OF CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS OUTLINING A SURE-TO-BE-CONTROVERSIAL INFORMATION NETWORK--

--WITH CONTACTS IN VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL CRIMINAL AND TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS.

THE DOCUMENTS INCLUDE THE UNREDACTED NAMES OF CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES WHO COOPERATED WITH VARIOUS LAW ENFORCEMENT AND COUNTER-TERRORISM AGENCIES--

OH, GOD-- BOSS-- *PLEASE*--

--I CAN EXPLAIN--

OH, THERE'S NO NEED TO, REALLY, I'M A FAST READER.

A SMART MOVE, SELLING INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR CLIENTS IN EXCHANGE FOR IMMUNITY. ANYONE IN THE POSITION YOU WERE IN WOULD HAVE DONE THE SAME.

YES, PERFECTLY UNDERSTANDABLE. AFTER ALL, YOU'RE A VERY SMART MAN, FRANKLIN.

I SHOULD LISTEN TO YOU MORE OFTEN--

MAYBE TELEVISION REALLY *IS* BAD FOR YOU.

"WHAT WE KNOW--THE INFORMATION WAS TAKEN BY FORCE FROM A HIGH SECURITY DATA STORAGE FACILITY IN SWITZERLAND JUST THREE HOURS AGO--WE'RE STILL WORKING ON IDENTIFYING THE ATTACKER.

"IT WAS UPLOADED TO AN FTP SERVER, AND EMAIL LINKS WERE ANONYMOUSLY SENT TO THE MEDIA A FEW MINUTES LATER. FROM THERE, IT'S GONE GLOBAL--THE DOSSIERS YOU HAVE IN YOUR HANDS, ***EVERYONE*** HAS NOW."

WE'RE POTENTIALLY LOOKING AT THE GREATEST SECURITY COMPROMISE IN HISTORY HERE. A COMPLETE LIST OF ANYONE THAT'S EVER PROVIDED US WITH ANY KIND OF TIP, EVER NAMED NAMES.

SOME OF THESE--I FOUGHT AGAINST SOME OF THESE MEN. THIS ONE PUBLICLY CALLED FOR THE ASSASSINATION OF ANY MUTANT SYMPATHIZERS THE DAY WE BURIED MOIRA MacTAGGERT...

WE'VE BEEN MAKING DEALS WITH THESE PEOPLE?

EVERYONE ON THIS LIST PROVIDED US WITH INFORMATION THAT SAVED LIVES. SOME DID IT FOR THE RIGHT REASONS, SOME DID IT TO EVADE IMPRISONMENT, SOME JUST DID IT FOR PROFIT.

PRETTY SOON I'M SURE THE ENTIRE WORLD WILL BE HAVING A CONVERSATION ABOUT THIS PROGRAM'S MORAL LEGITIMACY AND EFFECTIVENESS.

GOOD. WHEN THAT TIME COMES, I'LL ANSWER FOR IT.

BUT IN THE MEANTIME, WHAT WE HAVE ***RIGHT NOW*** ARE FOUR HUNDRED AND NINETEEN HIGH-LEVEL GOVERNMENT INFORMANTS EXPOSED AND OUT IN THE OPEN, MOST BEHIND ENEMY LINES.

BEST ESTIMATE SAYS WE HAVE LESS THAN THIRTY MINUTES TO GET THEM BEFORE THIS INFORMATION IS FULLY DISSEMINATED--

--AND THE MASS EXECUTIONS START.

THIS TEAM WAS FORMED TO DEAL WITH SECRET DANGERS BEFORE THEY HAVE A CHANCE TO BECOME WORLD-LEVEL THREATS. WELL, THE NAMES ON THIS LIST ARE HOW WE COME TO KNOW ABOUT THOSE DANGERS TO BEGIN WITH. SO, AS OF NOW, THIS IS OUR MISSION--

AS OF NOW, WE'RE PROTECTING OUR OWN SECRETS.

FORGIVE ME, COMMANDER, BUT BEYOND ANY OTHER RESERVATIONS I MIGHT HAVE, AS AN OBJECTIVE, THIS-- THIS SOUNDS *IMPOSSIBLE*.

"GOOD MORNING, MISTER PHELPS. YOUR MISSION, SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT..."

SORRY.

BEAST IS RIGHT, SIR. THERE'S NO WAY WE CAN EXTRACT THIS MANY ASSETS IN THAT TIME FRAME.

OF COURSE WE CAN'T. WE'RE NOT GOING TO.

WE'RE GOING TO EXTRACT *ONE* OF THEM.

THIS IS BENJAMIN ABRAMS, AN A.I.M. GENETICS RESEARCHER ON THEIR PAYROLL FOR THE LAST TEN YEARS.

SIX MONTHS AGO, VIA COVERT TRANSFER, WE RECEIVED A FLASH DRIVE WITH HIS NAME ALL OVER IT.

"THE DOCUMENTS ON THAT DRIVE HELPED US PREVENT A MAJOR BIOLOGICAL ATTACK IN BOSTON, AND LED TO THE SHUTDOWN OF AN ENTIRE BRANCH OF THE ORGANIZATION.

"IT'S THE ONLY CONTACT WE'VE EVER HAD WITH HIM, BUT IT SAVED THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE'S LIVES THAT DAY."

I'VE DONE OUR ASSESSMENT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, AND THIS MAN--THIS IS THE ONE THAT FITS THE CRITERIA.

ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT HE GAVE US THIS INFORMATION AS AN ACT OF CONSCIENCE, RATHER THAN GREED OR MALICE.

FROM A LOGISTICS STANDPOINT, HE RECENTLY TRANSFERRED, AND NOW WORKS IN AN QUASI-INDEPENDENT OFFSHOOT OF A.I.M. DAY-TO-DAY, WHICH MAY BUY US AT LEAST A FEW MORE MINUTES IN THE CONFUSION.

GEOGRAPHICALLY SPEAKING, WE KNOW HE'S HERE IN ARLINGTON, SO WE CAN GET TO HIM QUICKLY.

Oakton
Arlington
50
236
7100
Temple Hill

"AND HE HAS A FAMILY."

TO SPLIT UP OUR RESOURCES WOULD SPREAD US TOO THIN TO BE EFFECTIVE, AND WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO CALL IN ADEQUATE REINFORCEMENTS.

NO MATTER WHAT WE DO, A LOT OF MEN AND WOMEN ARE GOING TO DIE TONIGHT--AT LEAST A FEW OF THEM QUIET HEROES. I WANT TO GO TO SLEEP KNOWING WE DID ALL WE COULD TO HELP THEM.

EVEN IF IT MEANS WE ONLY GET TO SAVE ONE OF THEM.

WE HAVE HIS EXACT LOCATION THEN?

FOGGY BOTTOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

"BLACK WIDOW IS ON IT AS WE SPEAK."

ARE YOU GOING TO OFFER TO BUY ME A DRINK?

Hmmph. SUCH A BORING CLICHÉ--

IF A WOMAN DOESN'T WANT TO BE ALONE, SHE SHOULD TELL A MAN WHAT SHE WANTS. NONE OF THIS CAT AND MOUSE NONSENSE. WE BOTH KNOW WHAT IT REALLY IS.

MY, *SO DIRECT.* I'LL CONFESS, I'M A BIT SURPRISED.

I AM A BUSY MAN. I HAVE NO TIME FOR SUCH TIRED, TRITE PLEASANTRIES, ESPECIALLY NOT WHEN AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PLEASURE IS SO NEAR. *YOU UNDERSTAND?*

OH, *OF COURSE.* I MYSELF AM NOT MUCH FOR 'TIRED, TRITE PLEASANTRIES' EITHER. FOR INSTANCE, I'M ELECTING TO FORGO THE LITTLE GAME I WAS ABOUT TO PLAY WITH YOU.

AND WHAT GAME IS THAT?

THE ONE IN WHICH I PRETEND TO LET YOU SEDUCE ME AND TAKE ME BACK TO YOUR HOTEL ROOM, WHERE WE EMBRACE PASSIONATELY FOR A MOMENT...

...BUT THEN JUST AS I'M ABOUT TO UNDRESS--

I INSTEAD PULL MY GUN ON YOU.

WE SHOULD ALL BE PAST SUCH BORING CLICHÉS NOW, YES?

NO--
PLEASE--

YOU'VE BEEN AN INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR FOR A.I.M. FOR THE LAST FIFTEEN YEARS. THERE IS A MAN WORKING IN YOUR DEPARTMENT.

I NEED TO KNOW HIS WHEREABOUTS, YOU NEED TO KEEP THE FRONT OF YOUR SKULL INTACT. THERE IS ROOM FOR AGREEMENT HERE.

YOU WOULDN'T--THE BARTENDERS--THERE ARE WITNESSES!

NOT A CONCERN, MY DIRECT FRIEND--

THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT TIPS *VERY* WELL.

HOW DO YOU THINK WIDOW GOT THESE COORDINATES? DO YOU THINK SHE SLEPT WITH SOME GUY TO GET THEM? *I BET SHE SLEPT WITH SOME GUY TO GET THEM.*

ERIC, COME ON, MAN--

JUST SAYING, I WISH *I* HAD SOME COORDINATES ONCE IN A WHILE.

YOU SHOULD TALK TO HER. I BET IT'LL GO REALLY WELL.

HEY, YOU DON'T KNOW THAT.

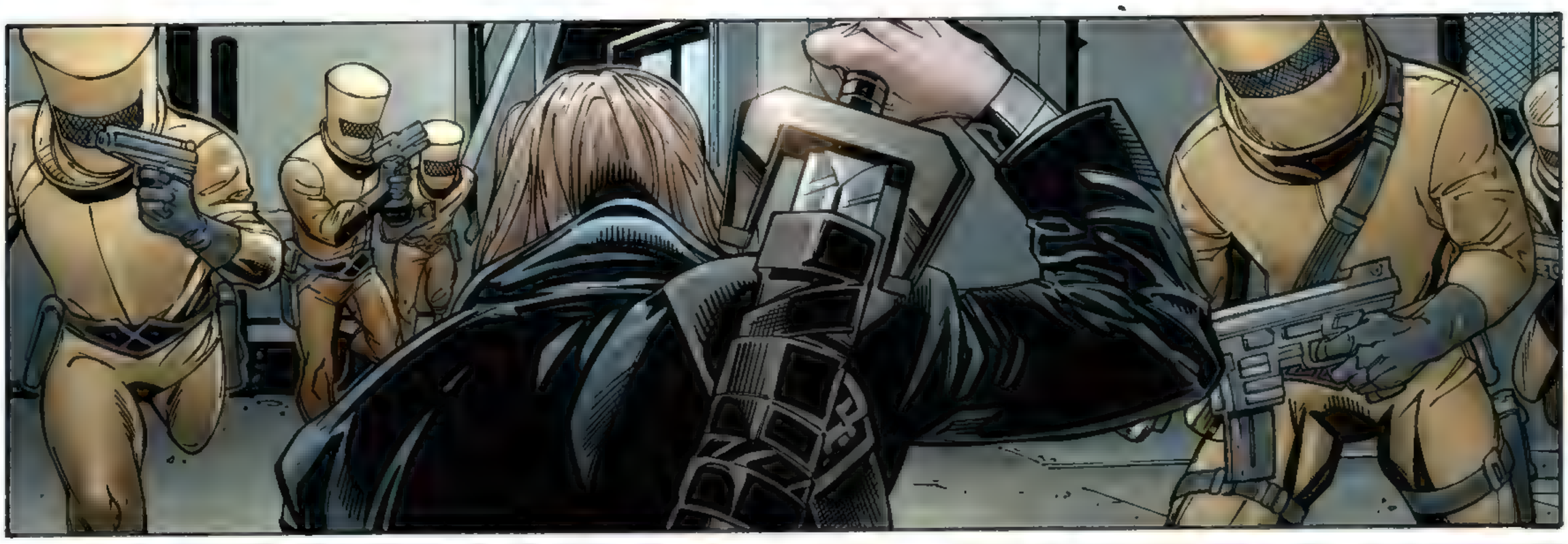
SHE MIGHT HAVE A NEWFOUND RESPECT FOR ME AFTER I GO BUSTING INTO HONEYCOMB HIDEOUT, YOUR GUNS BLAZING.

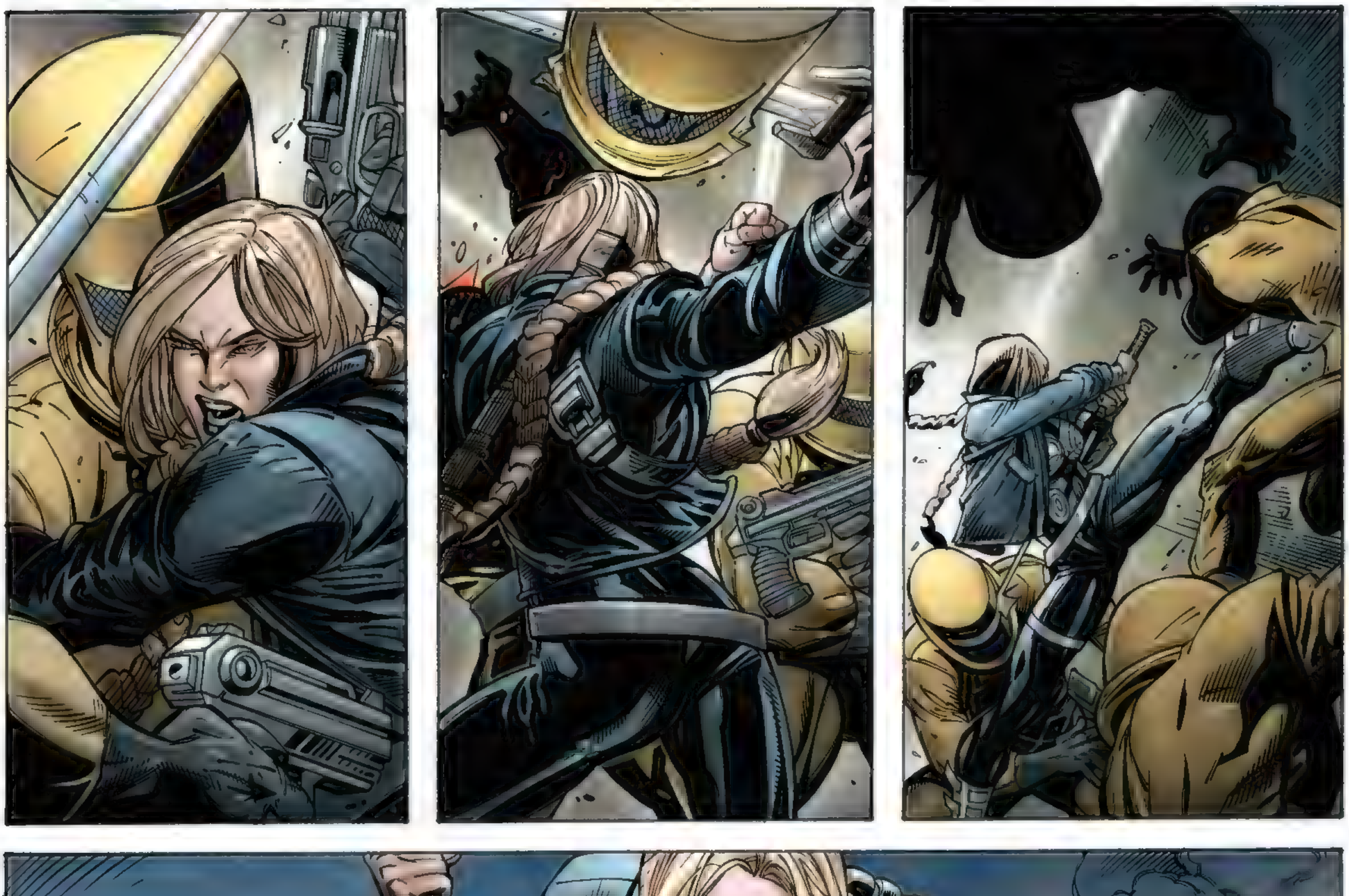
I SOMEHOW DOUBT IT.

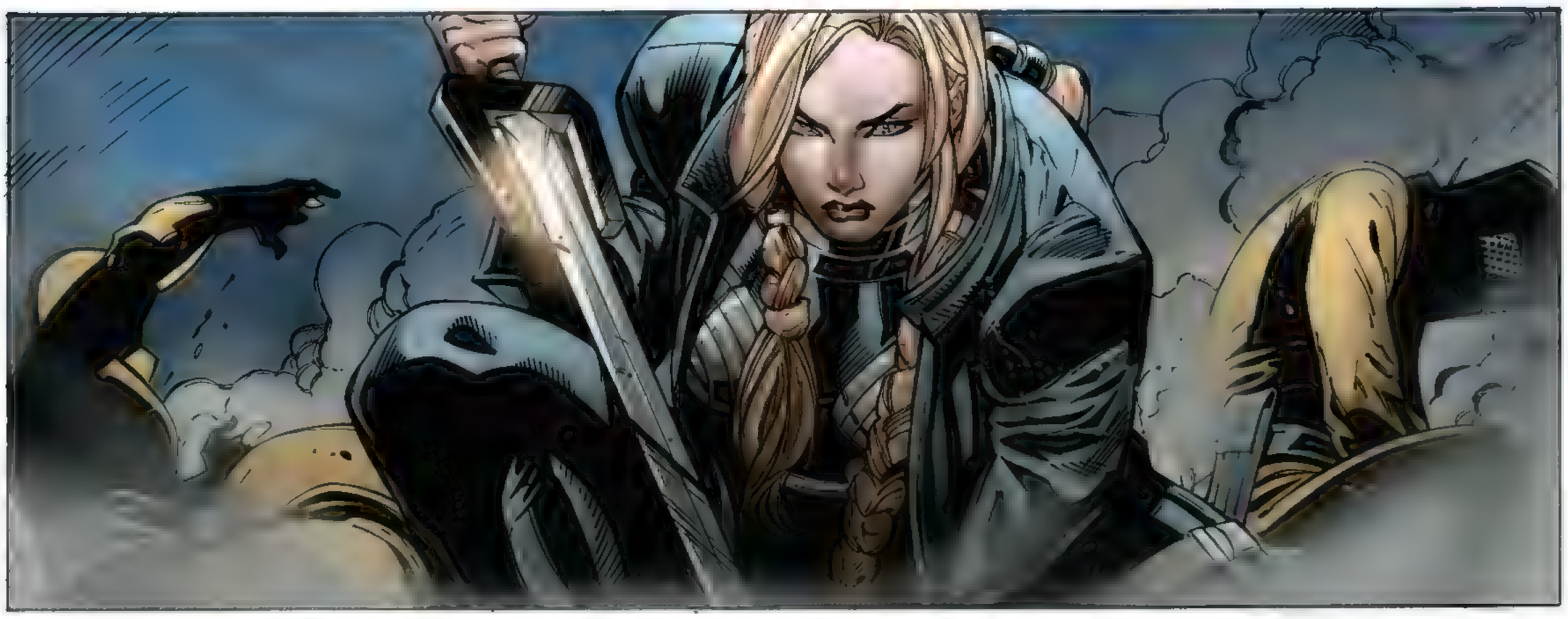
GET IT? *HONEYCOMB HIDEOUT?* BECAUSE THEY WEAR THOSE BEEKEEPER SUITS.

I GET IT. BUT I DON'T THINK WE'LL HAVE A HARD ENOUGH TIME DOWN THERE FOR YOU TO IMPRESS ANYONE--VALKYRIE'S ALREADY ON THE GROUND.

"SERIOUSLY? WELL, THAT'S JUST *GREAT--*"







YOU'RE SAYING THEY'RE ALL DEAD ALREADY?
PRETTY MUCH, YEAH.
DEPRESSING.

WAR MACHINE TO CONTROL-- VISUAL ON ASSET.

AW, THIS SUCKS--

HE'S NOT EVEN WEARING THE FUNNY HELMET--

HEY, *DUDE*-- WHERE'S YOUR FUNNY HELMET?

NNNNNNNMM!!

WELL, I WORE MINE.

JUST HOLD ON, MAN, WE GOT YA--

NNNNNNNMM!!

YOU IDIOTS!!!

SORRY? WHOA--

YOU'RE IN THE WRONG PLACE! IT'S NOT ME, *DAMN IT,* IT'S MY WIFE!

WHAT IS HE--

IT'S A SPOUSE IDENTITY DECOY PROGRAM, A SECURITY MEASURE--I COME IN HERE EVERY DAY FOR EIGHT HOURS AND DO NOTHING--THAT'S MY JOB, I'M THE COVER! ***MY WIFE*** IS THE ONE THAT WORKS FOR THEM, OUT OF OUR HOME--

WHY WOULD THEY SET UP SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

ARE YOU ***KIDDING?!*** LOOK WHAT JUST HAPPENED, WHERE ***ARE*** YOU?! WHO DID YOU COME AFTER?! LISTEN TO ME, YOU HAVE TO HURRY, THEY ***KNOW*** NOW--THEY'RE GOING TO ***KILL HER!***

DAMN IT.

PLEASE! WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME--

RIGHT, UH... COMMANDER, ARE YOU GETTING THIS? I THINK WE GOT THE WRONG--

I GOT IT. LET HIM KNOW WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO HER RIGHT NOW--

I TOLD HER NOT TO SEND YOU THOSE THINGS--SHE SAID IT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO. SHE SAID YOU WOULD PROTECT US IF ANYTHING HAPPENED. I SHOULD'VE STOPPED HER--

I SHOULD'VE STOPPED HER.

MOON KNIGHT-- SIT-REP.

I'M SORRY, SIR--

WE WERE TOO LATE.

"I CAN IMAGINE A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE GOING TO BE CALLING ME A TRAITOR RIGHT ABOUT NOW.

"AND I BET EVEN A FEW MORE WILL BE ASKING WHY I DID THIS."

FIRST THING YOU SHOULD KNOW IS, I LOVE MY COUNTRY. I DEDICATED MY LIFE TO SERVING IT, AND I DON'T REGRET THAT FOR A SECOND. ***EVEN NOW.*** KNOWING WHAT I KNOW.

"I FOUGHT IN AFGHANISTAN, AND WATCHED A LOT OF MY BROTHERS DIE WHEN SOME OF OUR MEN TURNED OUT TO BE SKRULLS DURING THE INVASION. I GUESS A THING LIKE THAT MAKES YOU THINK A LOT ABOUT WHO YOU SHOULD TRUST.

"I DON'T GIVE A DAMN IF THESE PEOPLE CALL THEMSELVES 'GOOD GUYS' OR 'BAD GUYS'. WAY I READ IT, THEY ALL DO THE SAME THINGS.

"AND THEY JUST KEEP DOING MORE AND MORE OF IT, WITHOUT ASKING ANYONE, WITHOUT WANTING TO BE HELD ***ACCOUNTABLE*** TO ANYONE."

"THEN WHEN I GOT HOME, ALL I SAW WAS A BUNCH OF PEOPLE FIGHTING OVER WHO GETS TO BE IN CHARGE OF KEEPING US ***'SAFE'***--AND NONE OF THEM DOING A VERY GOOD JOB OF IT. JUST ASK BROXTON.

02:22

I THINK IT'S TIME THE REST OF US HAD OUR SAY, TOO. SO THIS IS OUR MESSAGE. WHEN ALL OF YOU WHO APPOINT YOURSELVES OUR PROTECTORS BREAK THE PUBLIC TRUST--WHEN YOU PUT YOURSELF ABOVE THE LAW AND ABOVE WHAT'S JUST--

WE'LL BE THERE. WE HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW WHAT YOU DO IN OUR NAME.

Time left: 3hr 53min

THAT WAS REAL GOOD, CAP.

THANKS, RONNIE.

NOW JUST LIKE WE TALKED ABOUT-- UPLOAD IT AND SEND A LINK TO *THE GUARDIAN, THE TIMES, THE BUGLE*-- YOU KNOW THE LIST. AFTER THAT, I WANT YOU TO--

BOOOM

WELL, I CAN TELL YOU THIS MUCH--

--IF YOU'RE TRYING TO PERSUADE ME TO MAKE YOU THE NEXT U.S.AGENT, YOU'RE GOING ABOUT IT ***ALL WRONG.***

FUNNY, BUT NOT QUITE. MY MEMORY'S A BIT LONGER THAN THAT. YOU REMEMBER WHEN *YOU* WORE THIS UNIFORM, DON'T YOU?

"GOVERNMENT CRONIES TOLD YOU TO DO CAPTAIN AMERICA THEIR WAY OR WALK. ***YOU WALKED***. BECAME ***THE CAPTAIN*** INSTEAD."

YOU WERE TAKING A STAND AGAINST CORRUPTION BACK THEN. ***NOW*** LOOK AT YOU. TURNS OUT THEY GOT WHAT THEY WANTED IN THE END, YEAH?

ALL THEY HAD TO DO WAS GIVE YOU A LITTLE POWER. ALL THOSE YEARS OF THAT *"HOLIER THAN THOU"* ACT, THEN THEY PUT YOU IN CHARGE AND HERE WE ARE--

OUR GOVERNMENT IN BED WITH A BUNCH OF TERRORISTS, MURDERERS, AND DESPOTS, MOST OF 'EM SELLING EACH OTHER OUT TO GET AHEAD. SECRET AVENGERS TEAMS THAT DON'T ANSWER TO ANYONE BUT YOU--

YOU SOLD US OUT! WE DESERVE TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON--THE PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO--

CRACK

NOW--

--ARE YOU READY TO *LISTEN*, OR DO I HAVE TO HIT YOU A FEW MORE TIMES?

YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST PERSON TO COME AT ME CARRYING A FLAG, SON. AND YOU'RE *CERTAINLY* NOT THE FIRST TO CALL ME A TRAITOR FOR THAT MATTER.

I'VE GONE UP AGAINST PLENTY WHO BELIEVED WHAT THEY WERE DOING WAS RIGHT, THAT IT WOULD MEAN A BETTER WORLD, THAT THEY WERE THE HERO AND I WAS THE VILLAIN. SOMETIMES I'VE WONDERED IF THEY WERE RIGHT MYSELF.

THIS JOB I HAVE NOW--THIS JOB I FELL INTO, REALLY--THERE'S SHADES OF GRAY TO ALL OF IT. AND WHAT YOU SAID BEFORE MIGHT EVEN BE TRUE--IN A DIFFERENT TIME, *I* MIGHT BE THE ONE FIGHTING TO END SOMETHING LIKE THIS.

BUT IF I EVER START REALLY QUESTIONING MYSELF, AND WHETHER OR NOT I'M FIT TO DO THIS, I *REMEMBER*--

--I, AND THE PEOPLE I STAND WITH, *GOOD AND BAD*, FAULTS AND ALL--NO MATTER HOW RIGHT WE BELIEVED WE WERE...

WE'D NEVER LET PEOPLE DIE JUST TO PROVE OUR DAMN POINT.

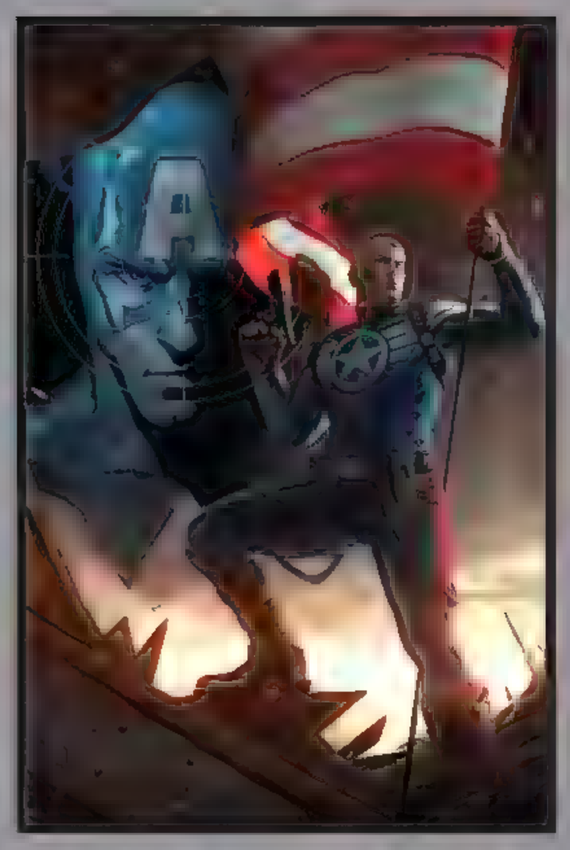
NOW I DON'T KNOW IF THAT'S ENOUGH FOR YOU, OR FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD, BUT FOR THE TIME BEING--

IT'LL HAVE TO DO.

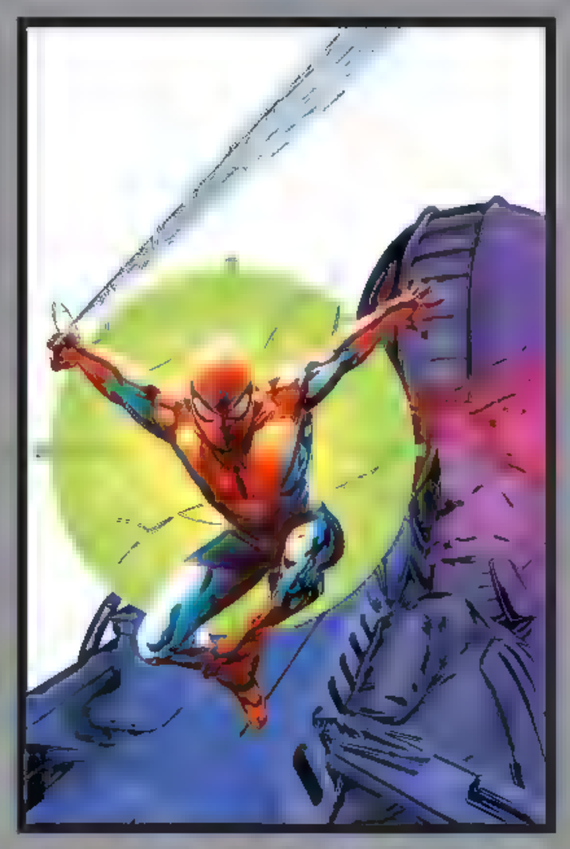
THE END

NEXT ISSUE!

SECRET AVENGERS #13
FEAR ITSELF!



CAPTAIN AMERICA #617
GULAG!



HEROES FOR HIRE #6
SPIDEY IN THE CROSSHAIRS!

AVENGERS #12
WHO WILL WIELD THE GAUNTLET?!

EMAIL US AT
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13

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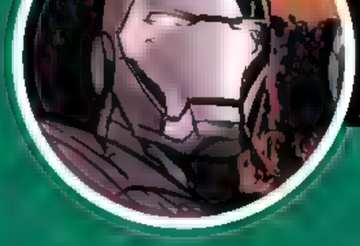
STEVE ROGERS

SHARON CARTER

VALKYRIE

BEAST



WAR MACHINE

ANT-MAN

BLACK WIDOW

MOON KNIGHT

PRINCE OF ORPHANS

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A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY AND FEAR GRIPS THE WORLD.

SIN, THE DAUGHTER OF THE RED SKULL, HAS UNLEASHED AN ANCIENT EVIL INTO THE WORLD: THE FORGOTTEN ASGARDIAN GOD KNOWN ONLY AS THE SERPENT! WITH HIS HAMMER-WIELDING MINIONS, THE SERPENT DEVASTATES THE EARTH IN HIS MARCH TOWARDS REVENGE ON ODIN AND ASGARD.

SIN'S OPENING SALVO IS ON THE NATION'S CAPITAL WITH THE INTENT OF RAZING EVERYTHING IN HER PATH.

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SCOT EATON — PENCILER
JAIME MENDOZA AND RICK KETCHAM — INKERS
FRANK D'ARMATA — COLORIST
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DAN BUCKLEY — PUBLISHER
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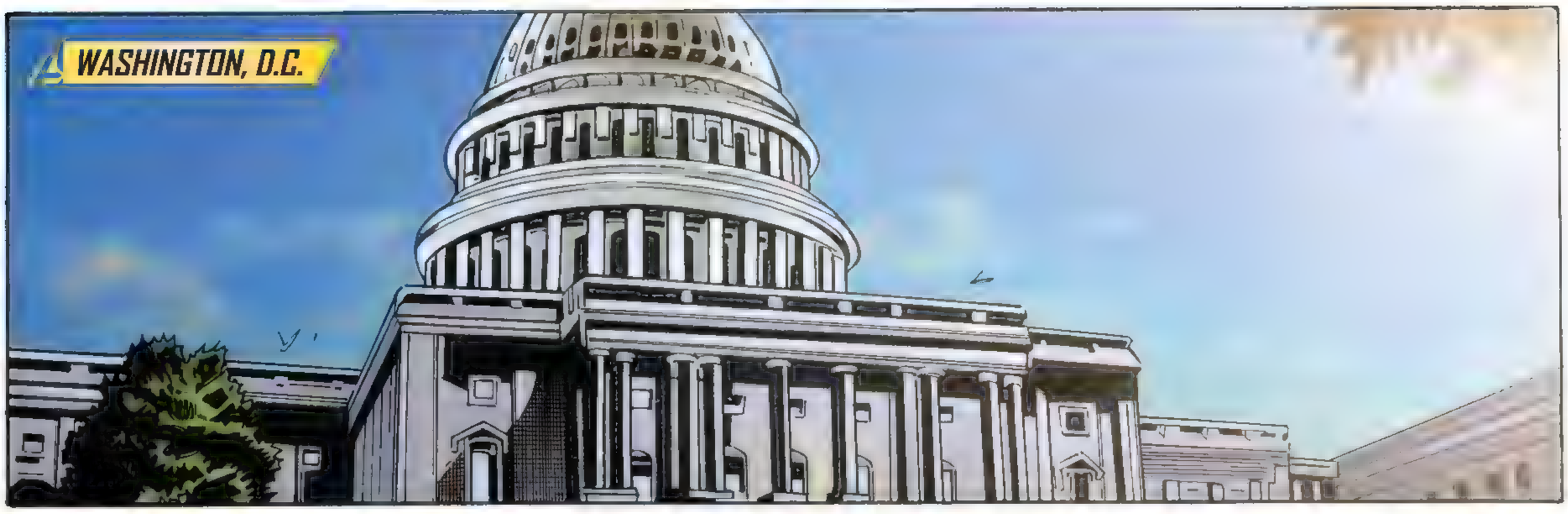
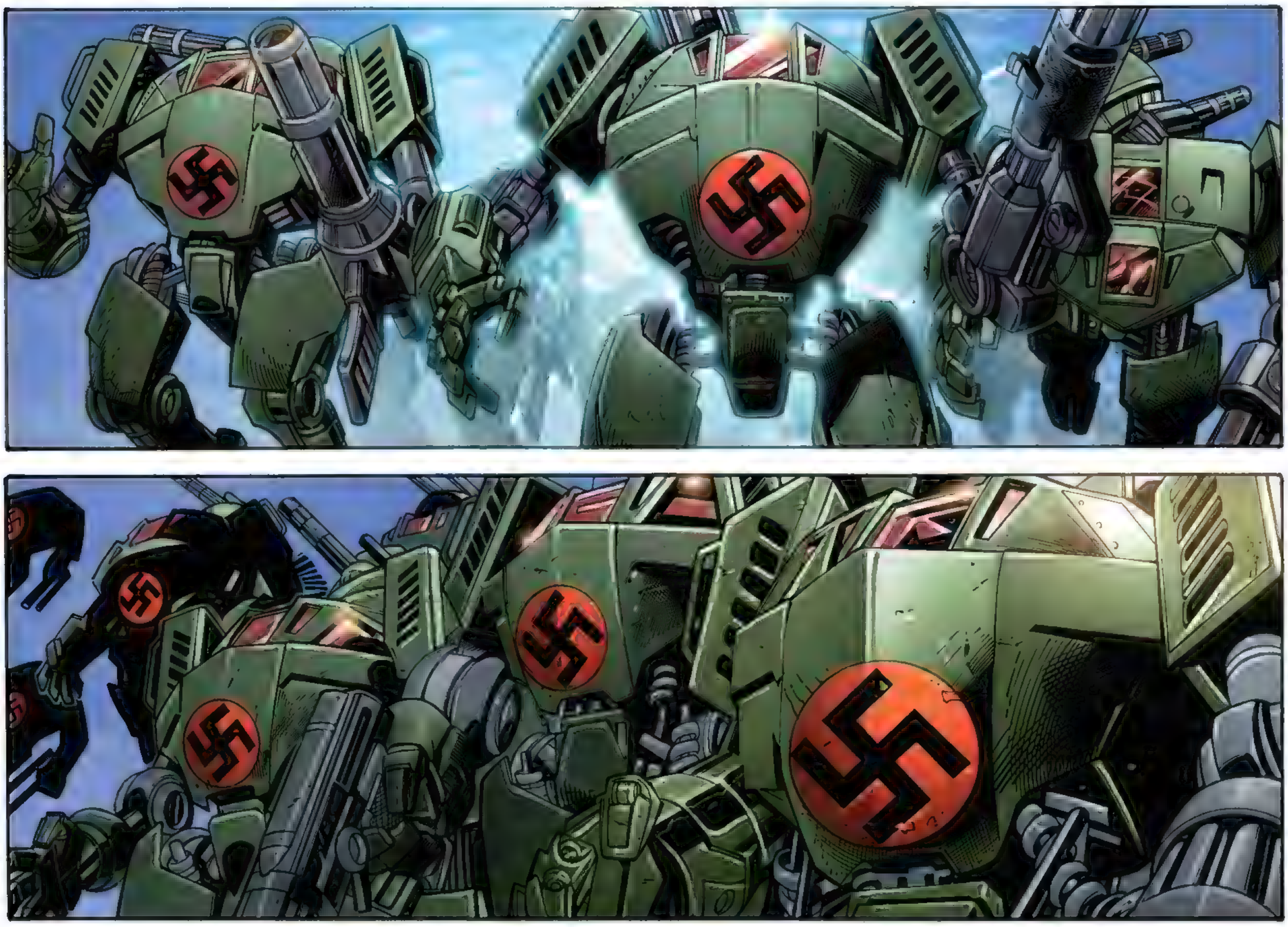

WASHINGTON, D.C.



BLITZKRIEG, U.S.A.

SEE, AND THIS IS WHAT I DON'T LIKE ABOUT HANGING OUT ON THE QUINCARRIER--I DON'T CARE HOW BIG THAT JACUZZI IS.

BIG INVADING ARMY COMES TO WASHINGTON, THERE'S NO WAY TO CALL THE BOSS AND PRETEND YOU'RE SICK. I BET THAT'S WHAT *PRINCE OF ORPHANS* DID. HE'S GOT THAT AWESOME RASPY VOICE. HE COULD FAKE A GOOD SORE THROAT.

ERIC, COME ON--

YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME? WHERE'S EVERYBODY ELSE?

IT WOULD APPEAR WE'RE THE FIRST RESPONSE TO STEVE'S CALL, ERIC. I'M SURE OUR FRIENDS ARE ON THE WAY.

WE BETTER HOPE SO. REINFORCEMENTS DON'T GET HERE SOON, WE'RE NOT GONNA BE ABLE TO DO MUCH AGAINST SOMETHING LIKE THIS.

OH, I DON'T KNOW, JAMES--

I'M SURE WE CAN MAKE OURSELVES USEFUL IN THE MEANTIME.

TH-THANK YOU, SIR. I--

I'M NOT A MILITARY MAN *PER SE*, MADAM, SO NO NEED FOR SUCH FORMALITIES--BUT I MAY WISH TO CALL YOU--

McCOY! WE NEED SOME HELP OVER HERE!

WAIT--McCOY? YOU'RE ***HENRY*** McCOY, RIGHT? THE BEAST?

I CERTAINLY AM. AND YOU--

MAJOR STEPHENSON IS LOOKING FOR YOU. HE TOLD ALL OF US, *"IF YOU SEE HIM, TELL HIM I NEED HIM TO REPORT IN."*

ER, I'M AFRAID I'M A BIT PREOCCUPIED AT THE MOMENT--

MAJOR SAYS IT'S IMPORTANT. HE NEEDS TO TALK TO YOU. ***NOW.***

YES, SEEMS LIKE A ***PERFECTLY*** LOGICAL TIME FOR A BRIEFING.

THANKS FOR GETTING OVER HERE. I KNOW IT'S HELL OUT THERE, BUT I'VE GOT A BIT OF AN-- *AWKWARD* SITUATION ON MY HANDS. HOPING YOU CAN HELP ME OUT.

I'LL CERTAINLY DO WHAT I CAN--

GREAT. YEAH. *SO,* WE CLEARED OUT LEADERSHIP AS SOON AS THE INVASION STARTED, JUST LIKE PROTOCOL. BUT--SOMETHING WENT WRONG, AND-- YOU'RE NOT GONNA BELIEVE THIS, BUT--WELL, I'M JUST GONNA *SAY IT*--

WE'VE GOT A *MEMBER OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS* IGNORING THE DAMN EVAC ORDER. DON'T ASK ME WHY, BUT HE'S LOCKED HIMSELF IN THE CHAMBER AND WON'T COME OUT.

STRANGE. WELL, YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF GUNS AND BOMBS HERE, MAJOR, I HAVE TO IMAGINE YOU'RE PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF MAKING YOUR WAY THROUGH A TWO-HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD OAK DOOR.

WE'VE GOT REASON TO BELIEVE HE'S ARMED IN THERE. AND QUITE FRANKLY, MY GUYS HAVE THEIR HANDS FULL ALREADY WITHOUT DEALING WITH A HOUSE MEMBER OFF HIS NUT.

FRUSTRATING, I'M SURE, BUT I HARDLY SEE WHY I'M NEEDED FOR THIS.

BECAUSE HE'S ASKING FOR YOU.

ME? WHY?

I DUNNO. JUST SAID, "I WANT TO SPEAK TO HENRY McCOY." THAT'S YOU, RIGHT? LOOK, I GOT ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT HERE, BUT--THIS KIND OF FIRE, THAT DOME ISN'T GONNA MAKE IT AN HOUR. YOU SHOULD KNOW, IF HE'S IN THERE--

I UNDERSTAND. MAY I ASK EXACTLY WHICH DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMAN WE'RE DEALING WITH HERE?

I'VE NEVER EVEN HEARD OF THE GUY. HE'S FROM MISSISSIPPI-- *"LEONARD GARY"?* YOU KNOW HIM?

LENNY.

WELL-- IT SURE TOOK YA LONG ENOUGH, YA BIG UGLY.

HELLO, LENNY. IT'S FUNNY, YOU KNOW, YOU DON'T *LOOK* CRAZY. BUT THEN, IT HAS BEEN A WHILE.

IT SURE HAS.

GOOD TO SEE YOU, OLD FRIEND.

YOU TOO, HENRY.

YOU EVER GET TO SEE THIS PLACE EMPTY BEFORE?

ALMOST. I WAS USUALLY THE FIRST ONE IN THE GUEST CHAMBER THOSE DAYS WHEN YOU'D MAKE SURE BOB KELLY'S ANTI-MUTANT BILLS NEVER MADE IT TO THE FLOOR HERE.

YEAH, WELL, US HOUSE GUYS DON'T TAKE KINDLY TO THE SENATE TELLIN' US WHAT TO DO.

FAIRLY CERTAIN YOUR BELIEF IN CIVIL RIGHTS HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT, AS WELL.

I WAS A YOUNGER MAN BACK THEN. ITCHING FOR A GOOD FIGHT. THAT SON OF A BITCH ALWAYS GAVE ONE.

YES, THOSE WERE HEADY DAYS, WEREN'T THEY? WHAT DO YOU SAY WE GO REMINISCE OVER A CUP OF TEA?

TEA? HENRY, I AM FROM ***MISSISSIPPI***. AT LEAST OFFER ME SOME GOOD FOOD WHEN YOU TALK THE FOOL TO ME.

LENNY, ***PLEASE***--THIS BUILDING WON'T STAND LONG UNDER THIS KIND OF ATTACK. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS IS ABOUT, BUT WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE. ***IMMEDIATELY.***

WELL, THAT'S GONNA BE A PROBLEM, MY FRIEND. YOU SEE--

I HAVE THE FLOOR.

THIS IS *BAD*, RIGHT?

EVERYONE CONCENTRATE YOUR FIRE ON THE LEFT FLANK!

I MEAN *REALLY* BAD.

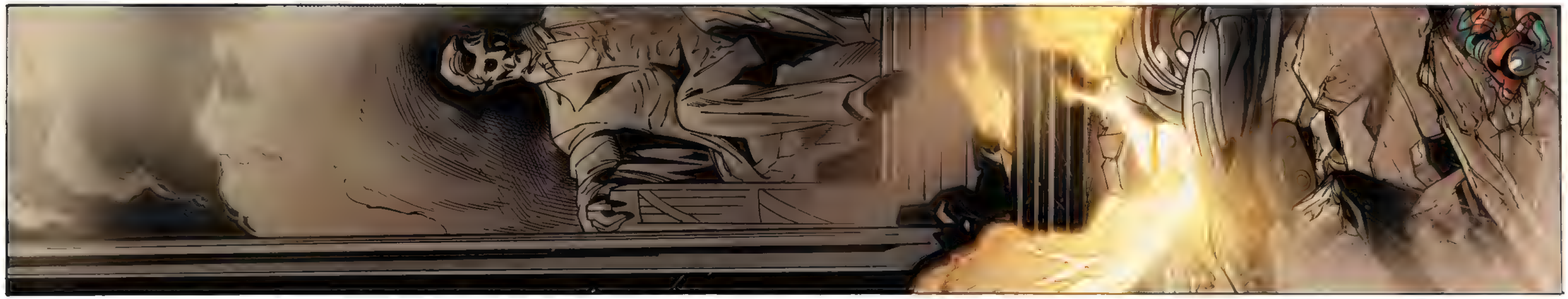
GET THOSE CIVILIANS OUT OF HERE!

WE-ARE-GONNA-LOSE BAD.

COVER EACH OTHER! WATCH YOUR BACKS!

EVERYBODY FALL BACK! FALL BACK!

DON'T-TELL-GIRLS-YOU-FOUGHT-IN-THIS-ONE BAD.



BOOM

I'M AFRAID I'M NOT FOLLOWING HERE--THE CHAMBER HAS BEEN CLEARED. HOW CAN YOU--

I DIDN'T HEAR THE GAVEL. THOSE BOYS RAN OUTTA HERE SO FAST, THEY DIDN'T CLOSE THE PROCEEDINGS. AS FAR AS RULES OF PARLIAMENT GO, EVERYBODY'S STILL PRESENT.

BUT WHY WOULD YOU--

YOU SEE THIS? THIS IS *MY* BILL.

THESE MINERS FROM WEST VIRGINIA, LOOKING FOR SOME EARMARK MONEY FOR A FREE HEALTH CLINIC, TO GET SOME REGULAR BREATH TESTS.

CONGRESS-MAN IN THEIR DISTRICT IS IN BED WITH THE COAL COMPANIES, SO THEY CAME TO ME. GAVE THEM MY WORD I'D SEE IT THROUGH.

THAT WAS *EIGHT YEARS AGO.* HALF THOSE MINERS THAT CAME TO MY OFFICE ARE DEAD NOW. BUT WE KEPT AT IT, AND I FINALLY GOT THIS DAMN THING TO THE FLOOR.

AND NOW WE'RE GONNA ADJOURN JUST 'CAUSE SOME ALIEN OR GOD OR WHATEVER THE HELL IT IS COMES KNOCKING? *NO, SIR.*

I ADMIRE YOUR PERSEVERANCE, OLD FRIEND, BUT I'M SURE THE SPEAKER WOULD ALLOW YOU TO RESUME--

I DON'T GET THE MICROPHONE TOO MUCH THESE DAYS.

THE SPEAKER DOESN'T GIVE A *DAMN* WHAT AN OLD MAN LIKE ME WANTS.

LENNY, YOU'RE A HERO. YOU MARCHED WITH *KING.*

YOU'VE DONE MORE THAN MOST OF THESE HACK POLITICIANS COULD DREAM OF.

ALL I EVER WANTED TO BE WAS A HISTORY TEACHER, YOU KNOW THAT?

I DIDN'T.

I WAS WORKING IN THIS LITTLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN JACKSON WHEN THE SIT-INS STARTED UP. I DIDN'T EVEN WANNA GO, IT WAS LOUISE'S IDEA.

THEN I WAS *ORGANIZING*. THEN I WAS *COMING HERE*, WITH THE BAPTIST CONFERENCE. AND FINALLY, PEOPLE STARTED SAYING, "LEONARD, WHY DON'T *YOU* RUN FOR CONGRESS?"

BUT I ALWAYS MISSED BEING WITH THE KIDS.

I MISSED BRINGIN' HISTORY TO LIFE FOR THEM, WATCHING THEIR LITTLE EYES LIGHT UP.

I ALWAYS THOUGHT I'D RETIRE FROM ALL THIS, GET BACK TO IT. BUT I GUESS--

BOOOOOM

LENNY, I'M SORRY--BUT WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE. THE MALL WON'T HOLD MUCH LONGER--

YOU ALWAYS WERE A GLOOMY FELLA, WEREN'T YA, HENRY? I WOULDN'T GIVE UP HOPE *JUST YET.*

DON'T YOU KNOW WHY THEY NEVER GAVE US ONE OF THOSE INITIATIVE TEAMS?

"WASHINGTON, D.C. CAN TAKE CARE OF ITSELF."

DUDE.

THIS ISN'T ABOUT THOSE MINERS, IS IT?

PEOPLE ARE SCARED OUT THERE, HENRY. SEEMS TO ME THE BEST THING A MAN LIKE MYSELF CAN DO IS SHOW THEM BUSINESS JUST GOES ON. MAYBE IF THEY SEE US DO THAT, THEY CAN KEEP GOING, TOO.

A NOBLE GESTURE, OLD FRIEND. BUT WHY DID YOU ASK FOR ME?

THOSE.

THE CAMERAS. THEY LEFT THEM ON WHEN THEY RAN OUT, BUT I'D IMAGINE THEY'VE SWITCHED OVER TO ALL THE FIGHTING OUTSIDE BY NOW.

I NEED THEM BACK, HENRY. AND THEN SOME. SO THAT THE PEOPLE CAN ***SEE***. SO THEY CAN SEE WE'RE NOT ***AFRAID***.

AND I FIGURED IF ANYONE COULD MAKE THAT HAPPEN, IT WOULD BE MY BUDDY, THE AVENGER. THINK YOU CAN GET THAT DONE FOR ME?

WELL--IF THAT'S REALLY WHAT YOU WANT-- I MIGHT BE ABLE TO. BUT FIRST, I NEED YOU TO ANSWER A QUESTION FOR ME--

ANYTHING.

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU FIRST REALIZED YOU WERE A MUTANT?

WELL-- NOW, I HAVE HEARD SOME SILLY THINGS, HENRY...

YOU'LL FORGIVE ME--

--BUT WHEN ONE OF CONGRESS' MOST FAITHFUL PRO-MUTANT VOTERS TALKS OF "*BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE*"--

--SOMEONE TRAINED SECURITY FORCES SEEM *LOATH* TO CONFRONT-- AND THEN I SEE A STATUE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN PULVERIZE AN INVADING ARMY--

NOW, JUST--

SUSPICIONS *ARISE.*

BUT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, THAT SOUNDS DAMN NEAR IMPOSSIBLE, DOESN'T IT? A LITTLE SCHOOLTEACHER FROM MISSISSIPPI, SERVING IN CONGRESS, A SECRET MUTANT THE WHOLE TIME?

STAYING OFF ALL THOSE GOVERNMENT LISTS, DUCKIN' THOSE ROBOTS, SURVIVING THE DECIMATION? HOW COULD HE DO IT?

I'VE SEEN IT BEFORE. WITH VERY *POWERFUL* MUTANTS, ABLE TO BEND AND WARP REALITY. NOT TO MENTION I'M SURE SOMEONE IN YOUR POSITION COULD EASILY GET THEMSELVES ACCESS TO A *POWER DAMPENER,* SO AS TO ELUDE CEREBRA AND OTHERS--

WELL, I GUESS IF SOMEBODY *DID*--AND I CERTAINLY AM NOT SAYING *I* DO--HAVE THAT KIND OF POWER, THEY'D OWE IT TO THEIR COUNTRY NOT TO LEAVE THEM IN THEIR DARKEST HOUR, NOW WOULDN'T THEY?

SO... YOU'RE NOT FIGHTING TO STAY HERE, YOU'RE STAYING HERE TO FIGHT.

NO, NO-- YOU'VE STILL GOT IT ALL WRONG, MY FRIEND...

TO STAY HERE *IS* TO FIGHT.

"YOU GO GET THOSE CAMERAS ON FOR ME, HENRY. I'LL TAKE CARE OF THE REST."

HANK, WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR--

THIS IS IMPORTANT, SHARON. PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE CAN DO RIGHT NOW.

WE HAVE ALL OF THEM ON BOARD, THEN?

EVERY NETWORK, BBC, AL-JAZEERA, YOU NAME IT. WHATEVER THIS GUY HAS TO SAY, THE ENTIRE WORLD IS GOING TO HEAR IT.

GOOD.

COME ON THEN, LENNY.

THANK YOU, MISTER PRESIDENT-- I--I--COME BEFORE YOU TODAY ON BEHALF OF THE--UH--

HELP ME, LOUISE.

ALL RIGHT, I'M JUST GONNA TALK. MY, AH--MY DADDY COULDN'T READ, BUT MY MOMMA COULD. AND SHE READ TO ME EVERY NIGHT.

WE HAD MOBS BACK THEN. MEN THAT DIDN'T LIKE WHAT PART OF TOWN WE LIVED IN.

SO SHE READ ME SPEECHES FROM A MAN WHO FOUGHT A WAR FOR FOLKS LIKE US, SO WE--SO WE COULD BE ***FREE***. FREE FROM ***OPPRESSION***, FREE FROM ***FEAR***.

OVER AND OVER, SHE'D READ THEM, 'TIL I KNEW EVERY WORD BY HEART.

AND WHEN SHE'D READ THEM, NO MATTER WHAT NOISE I HEARD OUTSIDE, NO MATTER WHO CAME KNOCKIN', I WASN'T SCARED NO MORE.

SO I FIGURE, SINCE I NEVER BEEN MUCH FOR BIG SPEECHES MYSELF, MAYBE RIGHT NOW THE BEST THING I CAN DO IS USE ***HIS*** WORDS. THE WORDS SHE TAUGHT ME, AND THEN I TAUGHT ***MY*** BOYS.

AHEM--

"FOUR--
FOUR SCORE AND SEVEN YEARS AGO, OUR FATHERS BROUGHT FORTH UPON THIS CONTINENT A NEW NATION--

"CONCEIVED IN LIBERTY--AND DEDICATED TO THE PROPOSITION THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL.

"NOW WE ARE ENGAGED IN A GREAT CIVIL WAR, TESTING WHETHER THAT NATION, OR ANY NATION SO CONCEIVED AND SO DEDICATED, CAN LONG ENDURE.

"WE ARE MET ON A GREAT BATTLEFIELD OF THAT WAR.

"WE HAVE COME TO DEDICATE A PORTION OF THAT FIELD AS A FINAL RESTING-PLACE FOR THOSE WHO HERE GAVE THEIR LIVES THAT THAT NATION MIGHT LIVE. IT IS ALTOGETHER FITTING AND PROPER THAT WE SHOULD DO THIS.

POLICE

"BUT IN A LARGER SENSE, WE CANNOT DEDICATE, WE CANNOT CONSECRATE, WE CANNOT HALLOW THIS GROUND.

"THE BRAVE MEN, LIVING AND DEAD, WHO STRUGGLED HERE HAVE CONSECRATED IT, FAR ABOVE OUR POOR POWER TO ADD OR DETRACT.

"THE WORLD WILL LITTLE NOTE NOR LONG REMEMBER WHAT WE SAY HERE, BUT IT CAN **NEVER** FORGET WHAT **THEY** DID HERE.

"IT IS FOR US, THE **LIVING**, RATHER, TO BE DEDICATED HERE TO THE UNFINISHED WORK WHICH THEY WHO FOUGHT HERE HAVE THUS FAR SO NOBLY ADVANCED.

"IT IS RATHER FOR **US** TO BE HERE DEDICATED TO THE GREAT TASK REMAINING BEFORE US--

--THAT FROM THESE HONORED DEAD WE TAKE INCREASED DEVOTION TO THAT CAUSE FOR WHICH THEY GAVE THE LAST FULL MEASURE OF DEVOTION--

"THAT WE HERE HIGHLY RESOLVE THAT THESE DEAD SHALL **NOT** HAVE DIED IN VAIN--

"THAT **THIS** NATION, UNDER GOD, SHALL HAVE A **NEW** BIRTH OF FREEDOM, AND THAT GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, **BY** THE PEOPLE, **FOR** THE PEOPLE--

"SHALL NOT--

"SHALL NOT PERISH FROM THE EARTH."

...SIGNAL LOST...

GOOD WORK, LENNY.

GOOD WORK.

NEXT ISSUE!

CAPTAIN AMERICA #618
PRISON BRAWL!

HEROES FOR HIRE #7
JURASSIC SNARK!

AVENGERS #13
FEAR ITSELF!

SECRET AVENGERS #14
BRING OUT YOUR DEAD!

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SECRET AVENGERS®

FEAR ITSELF™

SPENCER EATON MENDOZA D'ARMATA

MARVEL

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EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES, UNITED AGAINST A COMMON THREAT! ON THAT DAY THE AVENGERS WERE BORN, TO FIGHT FOES THAT NO SINGLE HERO COULD WITHSTAND!

SECRET AVENGERS

STEVE ROGERS

SHARON CARTER

VALKYRIE

BEAST

WAR MACHINE

ANT-MAN

BLACK WIDOW

MOON KNIGHT

BROUGHT TOGETHER AS A BLACK OPS UNIT BY FORMER CAPTAIN AMERICA STEVE ROGERS TO TAKE ON THE WORLD'S BIGGEST THREATS, WAR MACHINE, MOON KNIGHT, BEAST, ANT-MAN, BLACK WIDOW, VALKYRIE AND SHARON CARTER ARE THE SECRET AVENGERS.

A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY AND FEAR GRIPS THE WORLD.

SIN, THE DAUGHTER OF THE RED SKULL, HAS UNLEASHED AN ANCIENT EVIL INTO THE WORLD: THE FORGOTTEN ASGARDIAN GOD KNOWN ONLY AS THE SERPENT! WITH HIS HAMMER-WIELDING MINIONS, THE SERPENT DEVASTATES THE EARTH IN HIS MARCH TOWARDS REVENGE ON ODIN AND ASGARD.

SIN'S OPENING SALVO HAS DESTROYED WASHINGTON, D.C., TO WHICH SECRET AVENGER VALKYRIE BORE WITNESS. SIN NOW TURNS HER RAVENOUS HORDE NORTH TOWARDS NEW YORK CITY.

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DAVE LANPHEAR — LETTERER
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ALAN FINE — EXEC. PRODUCER

AYMES SAYS IT'S BAD OUT THERE.

IT'S *ALWAYS* BAD.

HE SAID THIS WAS DIFFERENT.

IT'S *ALWAYS* DIFFERENT.

WOULD YOU BE SERIOUS FOR AT LEAST A *SECOND?*

BABY, I AM BEIN' JUST AS SERIOUS AS I *CAN BE.* I KNOW WE'RE TEN MINUTES FROM GETTING DROPPED INTO THE WASP'S NEST--

--BUT I GOT ALL THE HONEY I NEED *RIGHT HERE.*

BEES.

WHAT?

OH, JUST KISS ME, YOU STUPID HICK.

BEES MAKE HONEY, NOT WASPS. WELL, THEY *DO,* ACTUALLY, BUT IT'S NOT THE KIND WE--

HAYES, COME ON, WE GOTTA--

STEVENS?!
HEYA, EMMETT.
YOU TWO ARE--
CLOSE THE DAMN DOOR, WOULD YA?
EW-- THIS IS JUST-- EW--
HAYES AND I ARE GROWN-UPS, EMMETT.
SOMEDAY, YOUR BODY WILL START GOING THROUGH THE MOST AMAZING CHANGES--
--YOU'LL FIND HAIRS IN PLACES YOU NEVER EXPECTED, AND YOU'LL BEGIN TO LOOK AT WOMEN VERY DIFFERENTLY, TOO.
YEAH, WELL, YOU TWO GROWN-UPS BETTER ZIP UP AND GET DOWN THERE--
CAPTAIN WANTS TO SEE EVERYONE ON THE DECK.

WHAT WE--

OH, GOOD. EVERYONE LOOK, HAYES AND STEVENS FINALLY DECIDED THEY COULD MAKE IT--

WELL, YOU KNOW US, CAPTAIN, WE LOVE US A GOOD *DAWDLE*.

GET TO YOUR SEAT, SON.

AS I WAS SAYING-- WHAT WE KNOW, AND WHAT WE DON'T KNOW.

WE DON'T KNOW WHO THEY ARE OR WHERE THEY CAME FROM.

WE *DO* KNOW THE SYMBOL THEY'RE WEARING AS THEY KILL THOUSANDS OF INNOCENT PEOPLE BY THE HOUR.

"WE *DO* KNOW OUR FIRST WAVE OF RESPONSE DIDN'T LAST AN HOUR-- AND PHILADELPHIA IS NOW *THEIRS*."

FINALLY, WE KNOW THIS IS A CRITICAL ENOUGH MISSION THAT COMMANDER ROGERS HAS SENT ONE OF HIS OWN AVENGERS--*VALKYRIE*--TO LEAD US INTO THE FIGHT.

MA'AM, WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY A FEW WORDS?

MOST OF YOU ARE GOING TO DIE TODAY.

I'LL FLY AWAY, OH GLORY, I'LL FLY AW-AAAY...

DID ANYONE EVER TELL YOU THAT YOU COULD SING? BECAUSE THEY GAVE ME A GUN JUST NOW, I'LL GO FIND THEM.

BABY, YOU ALWAYS LOVE MY GOLDEN VOICE WHEN I'M SINGING IN THE SHOWER.

YOU ARE A *RIDICULOUS* MAN.

THEY LOADING US UP ENOUGH, OR WHAT? I THOUGHT THIS WAS A CONTROL MISSION--

YOU KNOW HOW IT IS. JUST ANOTHER DAY AT THE OFFICE, THEY WANNA MAKE SURE YOU PACK A LUNCH.

THAT FOOTAGE CAPTAIN SHOWED LOOKED PRETTY BAD.

CAN'T BE NO WORSE THAN THE *SKRULLS.*

AND ANYHOW, WE'RE RIDING WITH AN *AVENGER* NOW. THAT'S SOMETHING.

SHE'S NOT ANY AVENGER *I'VE* EVER HEARD OF BEFORE.

YOU AIN'T HEARD OF VALKYRIE? HELL, SHE'S ONE OF THE *BIG GUNS.*

REALLY.

YEAH, BEEN ON THE TEAM A LONG TIME NOW.

WHICH ONE?

HUH?

WHICH TEAM?

...THE ONE WITH SPIDER-MAN?

POINT IS, WHEN THEM DOORS GO UP, THEY'RE ALL GONNA BE SHOOTING IN *HER* DIRECTION.

SO JUST KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN, AND GET AS MANY CIVILIANS CLEAR AS YOU CAN--THEM'S THE ORDERS.

SHE DOESN'T LOOK A LITTLE--I DON'T KNOW--NERVOUS TO YOU?

HER? TRUST ME ON THIS ONE THING, SWEETHEART--

THIS AIN'T *NOTHING* SHE HASN'T SEEN BEFORE.

Long Ago.

COME, BRUNHILDE! YOU CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT!

AYE, SIGMUND, I CAN-- BUT I WORRY IF I DO THIS *TOO* WELL, YOU MIGHT MISTAKE ME FOR ONE OF THOSE COMMON WOMEN YOU CONSORT WITH!

HAVE A GO THEN, SPOILED LITTLE DADDY'S GIRL! SHOW ME WHERE THAT ROYAL BLOOD'S BEEN HIDING!

BASTARD!

AND STILL SHE LETS ME GOAD HER INTO WEAKNESS--

UHNNFF!

YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO STRIKE MY HAND. IT'S AGAINST PROTOCOL.

PERHAPS WHEN THE USURPER'S ARMIES TAKE OUR CITY, YOU CAN TELL *THEM* AS MUCH.

YOUR COMPANIONS DON'T SEEM TOO WORRIED ABOUT SUCH THINGS.

INNER REALM KNIGHTS--*PATHETIC*. DISGRACE TO THEIR FATHERS IS WHAT THEY ARE.

PEACE AND PROSPERITY HAVE MADE THIS LOT SOFT. HALF COULDN'T EVEN LIFT THEIR WEAPONS ANYMORE, SAVE MAYBE TO GIVE THEM A TWIRL, WOO A WOMAN.

AND SO WE *TRAIN*. I CAN ONLY PROTECT YOU SO MUCH. YOU MUST LEARN TO DEFEND YOURSELF, MILADY.

THESE MEN MOVING TOWARDS US, THEY ARE HOLY TERRORS--NIGHTMARES TOO HORRIBLE TO BE REMEMBERED.

IF YOU COME ACROSS THEM, THERE WILL NO DECORUM OBSERVED, NO THRONE HONORED--

YOU WILL NEED TO SHOW THEM YOUR *SWORD*.

WHY, DEAREST SIGMUND, I NEVER IMAGINED I'D SEE MY FATHER'S BRAVEST WARRIOR SO RATTLED BY SOME UPSTART SKIRMISH--OUR SCOUTS CLAIM THE BATTLE IS ALREADY OURS, I'VE HEARD THE REPORTS.

PERHAPS YOUR BOREDOM HERE IN THIS COURT HAS MADE YOU A BIT--*EAGER* TO FIND DANGER WHERE THERE IS NO THREAT? A BIT TOO *EASILY* SHAKEN?

A MAN WOULD BE A *FOOL* TO NOT FEAR THE WRATH OF A GOD, MY PRINCESS. WE MUST ALL BE READY.

IF THE DESTROYER REACHES WRLSTEAD ARMS--

"--IT WILL BE THE END OF ALL WE LOVE."

YOU KNOW, AFTER THIS WHOLE THING GETS DONE, I THINK I WANNA TAKE YOU DOWN TO MEET MY MOMMA.

NOW I *KNOW* YOU DON'T THINK WE'RE GOING TO MAKE IT THROUGH THIS.

BOOOM

I GOT IT.

YOU REALLY DON'T.

BRAKAKAKAK

BOOOM

I EVER TELL YOU HOW MUCH I *LOVE* WATCHIN' YOU FIRE THAT THING OFF?

YEAH, *WELL*, YOU WERE RIGHT--

THE SKRULLS WERE *DEFINITELY* WORSE THAN THIS.

EMMIE, NO!!

FALL BACK, ALL OF YOU! TO THE TUNNELS! I'LL TAKE THE PRINCESS! DON'T LOOK BACK!

IS MY FATHER OUT THERE? I WON'T LEAVE WITHOUT--

PRINCESS, GET AWAY FROM THERE!

GURRRK!

SIGMUND!

BRU--BRUNHILDE...

NO...NO... MY DARLING... SIGMUND...

I-- I HAVE TRIED TO PROTECT YOU...

USURPER.

HE'S GONE...

COME ON. THE RETREAT HAS BEGUN. THERE ARE TOO MANY OF THEM. YOU HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE.

I CAN'T--

YES, YOU CAN. HE'S DEAD. YOU MUST GO, BEFORE--

I CAN'T JUST LEAVE HIM HERE!

LEAVE NOW, GIRL--

ODIN COMMANDS.

ABANDON YOUR DEAD AND MAKE FOR THE HILLS. I WILL DEAL WITH THE MEN FIRST, AND SPARE YOU A FEW MORE HOURS.

NO.

NO?

YOU WOULD DEFY EVEN MY MERCY?!

I--I WOULD NOT ABANDON THE DEAD--HE IS TO BE BURIED, SO THAT HIS SOUL MAY BE CARED FOR!

THAT IS OUR WAY, *MONSTER.*

YOU WOULD DARE CHALLENGE A *GOD*--OVER A *CORPSE*?!

BRUNHILDE.

BRUNHILDE. SHEATHE YOUR BLADE, HAVE A LISTEN.

WHY WOULD I--

BECAUSE THE OTHER OFFER BEFORE YOU IS AN EMPTY DEATH.

HEH. WHAT IS YOUR NAME, CHILD?

BRUNHILDE... I KNOW YOU THINK ME THE DESECRATOR. THE DESTROYER. *USURPER.*

BUT YOU-- AND ALL OF YOUR PEOPLE--YOU HAVE BEEN *DECEIVED.* DECEIVED AND MADE *SICK.*

I BELIEVE IF YOU LOOK DEEP IN YOUR HEART, YOU KNOW I SPEAK THE TRUTH.

THIS WAR-- THIS *UNENDING* WAR IT WOULD SEEM--I TAKE NO JOY IN IT. IT IS WHAT *MUST* BE DONE.

BUT LATELY IT HAS OCCURRED TO ME, IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS DEATH AND TORMENT-- THAT ONCE THE FIRES HAVE SETTLED--

I--I HAVE *REALIZED*--

IF I AM TO BE MAN'S *GOD*--

--THEN I MUST GIVE HIM A *HEAVEN.*

YOU WOULD *DIE* TO ENSURE THIS MAN'S SOUL CARRIED ON?

I *WOULD.*

PICK HIM UP. I WILL SEE YOU OFF THE FIELD.

I-- I CAN'T. HE'S TOO *HEAVY--*

AND YOU WOULD DO THIS FOR YOUR COUNTRYMEN AS WELL?

THIS ONE, I LOVE. BUT--YES.

ALL GOOD MEN WHO DIE IN BATTLE DESERVE AS MUCH.

THEN I WOULD GIVE YOU ANOTHER CHOICE. AN OFFER. A-- *POSITION* OF SORTS.

LET ME.

"WHEN THEY PERISH IN THE FIELDS OF WAR, YOU WILL CARRY THE SOULS OF DESERVING WARRIORS TO A PLACE CALLED *VALHALLA--*

"WHERE THEY SHALL KNOW *EVERLASTING PEACE.*"

YOU WILL BE THEIR *PROTECTOR*, AND THEIR *GUIDE*, WHEN THEY LEAVE THE MORTAL REALM.

WHAT CHOICE IS THERE IN THIS? SIGMUND, MY LOVE... I WILL NOT ABANDON YOU.

"BUT YOU WILL BE MORE, AS WELL. YOU WILL BE A *SYMBOL*. MEN WILL COMMIT GREAT ACTS OF BRAVERY AND SACRIFICE, FOR JUST THE HOPE OF GLIMPSING YOUR FACE. YOU WILL *INSPIRE* THEM.

"AND I GIVE YOU MY WORD, GIRL, IF YOU DO THIS, ONE DAY, MANY AGES FROM NOW, WHEN YOUR SERVICE IS FINISHED--"

YOU WILL JOIN YOUR LOST LOVE THERE, IN *PARADISE*.

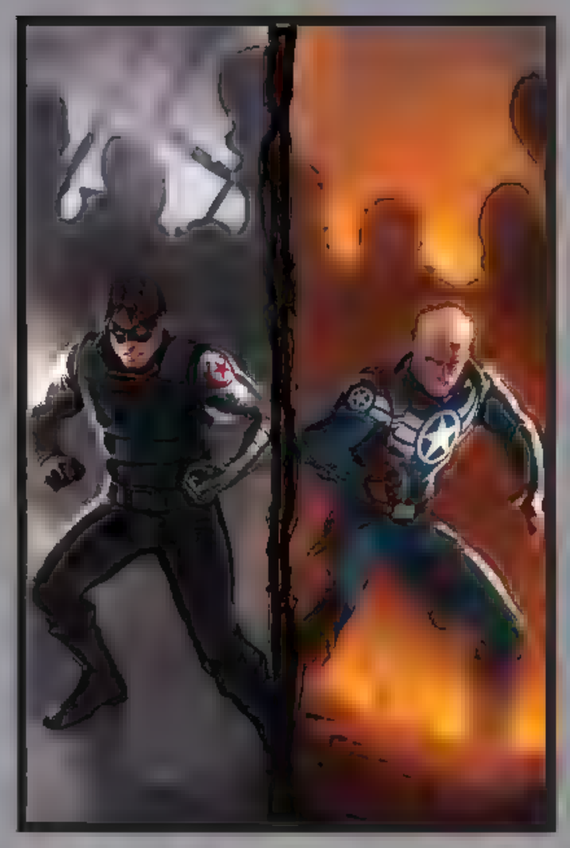
THIS IS YOUR CALLING, *BRUNHILDE OF WRLSTEAD ARMS*, IF YOU WOULD HAVE IT--

"YOU WILL BE MY *VALKYRIE*."

FIN.

NEXT ISSUE!

SECRET AVENGERS #15
A WIDOW MOURNS!



CAPTAIN AMERICA #619
THE BITTER END!

HEROES FOR HIRE #9
FEAR ITSELF!

AVENGERS #14
RED HULK!

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NEWS

AVENGERS SMASHED BY HULK IN BRAZIL?

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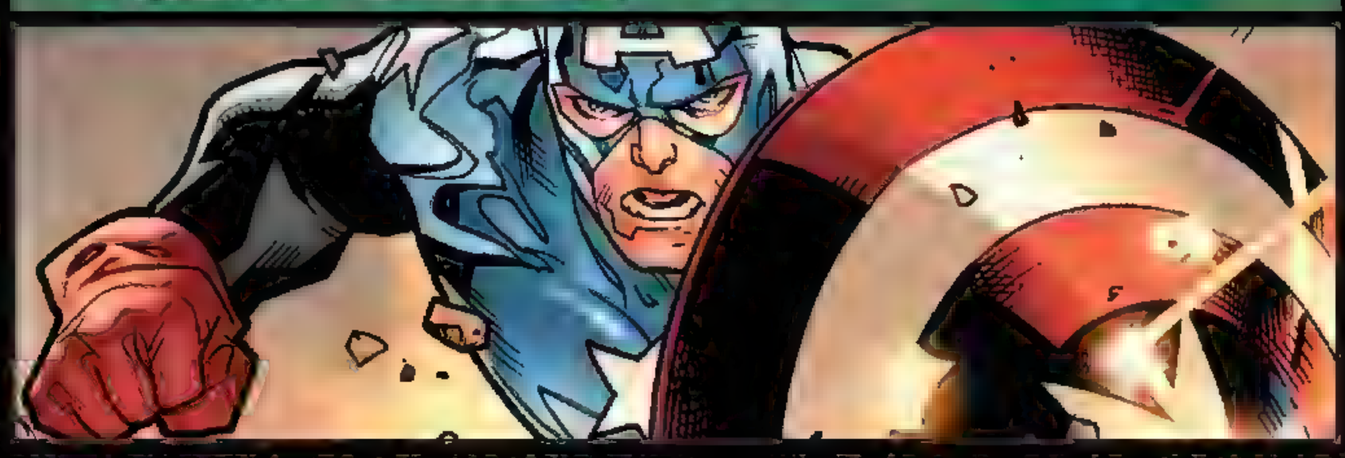
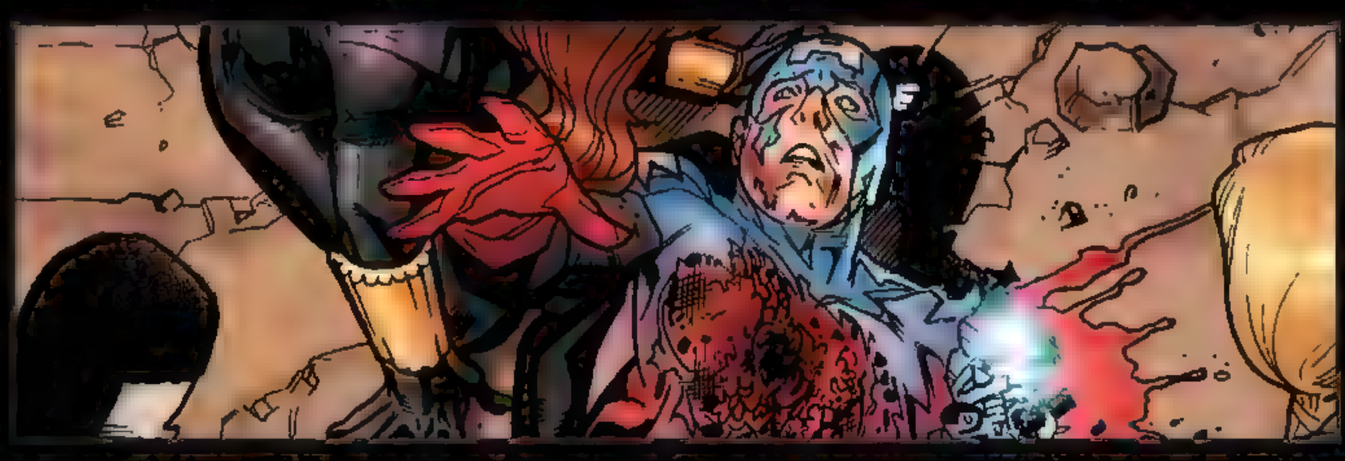
BREAKING WEB EXCLUSIVE:

CAPTAIN AMERICA ISN'T DEAD!

JULY 27, 2011 | 11,062,004 COMMENTS Read the full article by clicking here.

PHOTO GALLERY





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WHERE IS IT?

WHOA.

I SAID WHERE IS IT?

UMM... WHERE IS *WHAT*?

THIS.

CAPTAIN AMERICA DEATH A HOAX!

OH, RIGHT. SURE. THAT.

THING STORMS NYC!

CAPTAIN AMERICA DEATH A HOAX!

NOW, IS SOMEONE GOING TO GET COOPERATIVE? BECAUSE IF NOT, I'LL BE HAPPY TO MAKE YOU MORE SO--

THE HELL YOU WILL.

SAY IT AGAIN.

YOU'RE HERE ILLEGALLY.

NOT WITH *MY* SECURITY CLEARANCE, I'M NOT.

WE'LL HAVE TO FIND OUT WHAT THE COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION THINKS OF THAT.

UH, *LORI*, I'M PRETTY SURE SHE'S GONNA SHOOT SOMEBODY IF YOU KEEP--

NO, JOSH, *SHE ISN'T.*

THIS IS NATASHA ROMANOV--*THE BLACK WIDOW.* SHE'S AN AVENGER. SHE WORKS DIRECTLY UNDER STEVE ROGERS. SHE CAN'T SHOOT ANYONE.

OKAY, FINE. SHE *WON'T* SHOOT ANYONE.

NOR DOES SHE HAVE ANY NEED TO.

NOT WHEN SHE CAN PUT THE GUN AWAY AND DISCUSS THIS WITH US LIKE THE OCCASIONALLY REASONABLE ADULTS WE ARE.

FANTASTIC. NOW, *WILL*, GO GET SEVEN BROOMS. YOU WERE SAYING--

YOU'RE CLAIMING TO HAVE EVIDENCE THAT *BUCKY BARNES-- CAPTAIN AMERICA--* ISN'T DEAD.

WE ARE.

HE IS.

IF YOU SAY SO.

I'VE BEEN SENT TO COLLECT WHATEVER YOU HAVE.

YOU *REALLY* HAVEN'T.

EXCUSE ME?

NOBODY SENT YOU.

SORRY?

THE TWO OF YOU--YOU WERE A THING, WEREN'T YOU? WE WROTE THAT UP, TOO. SURPRISED YOU DIDN'T PAY US A VISIT THEN.

I COULD REALLY CARE LESS WHAT KIND OF TABLOID GOSSIP TRASH YOU PEOPLE RUN. THIS IS DIFFERENT.

IT CERTAINLY IS. I'M VERY SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS.

IF YOU HAVE INFORMATION IN YOUR POSSESSION REGARDING BUCKY BARNES, THERE'S A COMPELLING STATE INTEREST IN PLAY HERE.

THAT'S WHY YOU GET THE VISIT NOW.

I DON'T THINK THAT'S WHAT'S GOING ON HERE AT ALL, BUT FINE.

WELL, YOU CAN RELAX. THIS IS JUST AN ANNOYING WASTE OF TIME FOR YOU--

CONSIDERING WE DON'T *HAVE* ANYTHING.

I'M SORRY, DID YOU SAY--?

I SAID WE DON'T HAVE ANYTHING.

WELL, THAT'S NOT *ENTIRELY* TRUE--

WE'VE GOT A HEADLINE THAT'S GENERATING HIGHER VOLUMES OF TRAFFIC THAN ANYTHING WE'VE SEEN BEFORE.

SINCE WE POSTED THIS, UNIQUE VISITS AND PAGE VIEWS ARE THROUGH THE ROOF.

I MEAN, THIS IS *THE UNLIKELY TRUTH*--WE PAY OUR BILLS ON MUG SHOTS AND CONCERT RIDERS FROM POP STARS. *THIS*-- THIS IS ON A WHOLE NEW LEVEL.

YOU JUST-- *MADE IT UP?*

SURE. A COUPLE ANONYMOUS QUOTES, A TEASE HERE AND THERE, AND WE PLACE OUR BET.

BET?

WELL-- *COME ON*. I MEAN, WE'VE GOT GOOD ODDS HERE. THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME CAPTAIN AMERICA'S DIED.

AND WHEN HE COMES BACK, WE'LL LOOK LIKE WE WERE WAY AHEAD OF THE GAME. PEOPLE WON'T REMEMBER THE DETAILS, THEY'LL JUST REMEMBER *WE* SAID IT FIRST.

LOOK, I'M SORRY ABOUT YOUR BOYFRIEND AND ALL, I AM. BUT WE GOT A BUSINESS TO RUN HERE. THESE DEATH STORIES-- THE READERSHIP GOES THROUGH THE *ROOF* EVERY TIME WE RUN ONE.

YOU CAN GET MAD AT US, BUT QUITE FRANKLY, IF I WERE YOU, I'D BE WORRIED ABOUT WHY MOST PEOPLE ONLY SEEM TO GIVE A DAMN ABOUT YOU WHEN YOU *CROAK*.

KEEP TALKING LIKE THAT, YES?

I--I *SAID* I WAS SORRY ABOUT YOUR BOYFRIEND--

YOU PEOPLE ARE DISGUSTING. THIS MAN YOU'RE PROFITING OFF OF RIGHT NOW--

HE WAS A REAL PERSON.

"HE HAD FRIENDS--

"HE WAS LOVED--

"HE *STOOD* FOR SOMETHING."

HE WASN'T JUST SOME COSTUME, SOME COMMODITY FOR YOU TO SPEW FILTH ALL OVER IN THE NAME OF MASS CONSUMPTION.

NOT ONLY THAT, BUT KNOW THIS--HE GAVE US HIS LIFE FOR *YOU*.

AND THIS IS HOW YOU REPAY HIM FOR THAT SACRIFICE?

IF ALL OF YOU PUT TOGETHER HAD EVEN A *TENTH* OF THE DECENCY HE HAD, YOU WOULD SHUT THIS WHOLE PATHETIC ENTERPRISE DOWN AND DEDICATE YOUR LIVES TO HELPING OTHERS JUST TO ATONE FOR THIS.

BUT, OF COURSE, YOU WON'T.

YOU'RE A BIG *SUCCESS*, AREN'T YOU? PEOPLE ARE PAYING ATTENTION. YOU'RE MAKING MONEY.

TO **HELL** WITH YOU ALL.

OH CRY ME A RIVER.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

DANA--

NO. I--I SAID *CRY ME A RIVER.*

YOU KNOW, MY *GRANDDAD*-- HE WAS AROUND THE *FIRST* TIME CAPTAIN AMERICA DIED. BUCKY TOO, OBVIOUSLY.

"HE KEPT A PICTURE HE HAD TAKEN WITH THEM, FROM WHEN HE WAS IN THE NAVY BACK IN WORLD WAR II. HE *CHERISHED* THAT THING.

"THEN CAPTAIN AMERICA *CAME BACK.* FOR HIM, THAT WAS JUST THE GREATEST THING EVER. HE WOULD CHOKE UP TALKING ABOUT IT.

"IT WAS LIKE HIS HERO HAD BEATEN *DEATH.* IT MEANT SOMETHING TO HIM--TO HIM IT SAID SOMETHING ABOUT THE WHOLE COUNTRY. *WE* WERE BACK, TOO. *ALL OF US.*

"ANYHOW, YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO MY GRANDDAD LAST YEAR? HE GOT *CANCER.* HE WAS TOO WEAK FOR THE CHEMO, SO IT ONLY TOOK A FEW WEEKS. HE'S DEAD NOW.

"AND GUESS WHAT? HE DOESN'T GET TO COME BACK. HE DOESN'T GET HEALED, OR CLONED, OR HAVE HIS CONSCIOUSNESS MOVED SOMEPLACE ELSE. HE'S JUST *DEAD.*"

SO YOU WANNA STAND THERE AND TALK ABOUT HOW THESE ARE *REAL PEOPLE?* HOW THEY HAVE *REAL LIVES?* YOU START PLAYING BY *REAL PEOPLE RULES.*

DEAD MEANS DEAD FOR US. WE DON'T GET *EXCEPTIONS.*

SHE'S RIGHT. YOU WANT PEOPLE TO FEEL BAD ABOUT THIS STUFF, DYING'S GOTTA *MEAN* SOMETHING.

'CAUSE RIGHT NOW, I'D SIGN UP FOR YOUR KIND OF DEATH. NICE, LONG SIX-MONTH NAP, YOU COME BACK HEALTHIER THAN EVER AND EVERYBODY LOVES YOU. AWESOME.

HMM. IS THAT REALLY HOW YOU SEE IT?

WELL, *ISN'T IT?* I MEAN, WHAT'S-HER-NAME WITH THE X-MEN--

JEAN GREY.

YEAH, HER. SHE SEEMS TO LIKE DOING IT ENOUGH.

LET ME ASK--HAVE ANY OF YOU EVER BEEN IN A CAR ACCIDENT? NOT SOME LITTLE FENDER BENDER--THE REAL THING.

MY ROOMMATE DID. SHE GOT LIKE THREE SURGERIES.

AND NOW I'D GUESS SHE GETS VERY NERVOUS ON LONG CAR RIDES. OR RIDING IN CABS.

SURE.

THIS *"NICE LONG NAP"* YOU DESCRIBE? IT'S PRECEDED BY A DEATH. NOT A COMA, EVEN--WE'RE TALKING ABOUT ACTUAL, PHYSICAL *DEATH.*

"HOW *TRAUMATIC* AN EXPERIENCE SOMETHING LIKE THAT IS?

"TO HAVE FELT THE LIFE DRAIN OUT OF YOU, AND THEN COME BACK FROM THAT?

"TO HAVE KNOWN THAT FEAR, TO HAVE FELT THAT COLD--THAT ***CHANGES*** YOU.

"AND THEN TO NOT JUST LIVE AGAIN, BUT--MOST OF THE PEOPLE YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, THEY DIED ***FIGHTING.***

"FOR THEM TO GO FROM THAT, TO BACK TO THE FRONT LINES, SOMETIMES WITHIN AN ***HOUR'S*** TIME?"

IS *THAT* SOMETHING YOU'D SIGN UP FOR?

OKAY, FINE--*SORRY.* IT'S NOT A WALK IN THE PARK. THAT'S OVERSTATING IT.

BUT IT STILL AIN'T *THE BIG D.*

AND BESIDES, REALLY, WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT *THEM* HERE, ARE WE? WE'RE TALKING ABOUT *YOU.*

SEE, WHEN WE LOSE SOMEONE, WE KNOW WE'VE LOST THEM FOREVER. *THAT'S IT.* IT'S *TOUGH* TO FOSTER MUCH SYMPATHY FOR THE LOVED ONES, THOUGH, WHEN WE KNOW THE WHOLE THING IS TEMPORARY.

WHAT WAS YOUR NAME AGAIN?

JOSH.

SHUT UP, JOSH.

YOU AGREE WITH HIM?

IT'S NOT THE SAME. WHEN *YOU* LOSE SOMEONE YOU CARE ABOUT, YOU KNOW THEY COULD COME BACK.

YOU SAY THAT LIKE IT'S A GOOD THING.

"WHAT IF THEY CAME BACK AFTER YOU'D TRIED TO BUILD A NEW LIFE FOR YOURSELF?

"WHAT IF YOU'D BOTH CHANGED SO MUCH EVERYTHING YOU HAD WAS ALREADY GONE?

"COULD IT EVER REALLY BE THE SAME AGAIN?"

BUT MORE THAN THAT, WHEN YOUR GRANDFATHER-- *DANA*, IS IT?--WHEN YOUR GRANDFATHER PASSES, DANA, YOU GET ANGRY, YOU LIVE IN DENIAL FOR A WHILE...

YOU FEEL ALL THOSE STAGES OF GRIEVING.

EVENTUALLY, THOUGH, YOU REALIZE HE'S GONE, AND IN SPITE OF ALL YOUR SADNESS, YOU MOVE ON WITH YOUR LIFE.

BUT... IF YOU KNEW THERE WAS A CHANCE-- EVEN A *SMALL* CHANCE-- THAT HE COULD COME BACK... YOU MIGHT *NEVER* MOVE ON.

YOU MIGHT STAY THERE, JUST *WAITING*, JUST *HOPING*, PRETENDING IT DIDN'T HAPPEN--

COULD YOU EVER REALLY HEAL KNOWING THAT?

OKAY, ENLIGHTENING ENOUGH--

YOU THREE. OUT.

IT'S TIME FOR US TO TALK *BUSINESS*.

I APOLOGIZE FOR MY STAFF. THEY'RE YOUNG AND STUPID.

MOSTLY *STUPID.*

SO WHAT CAN WE DO HERE?

DO WHAT YOU WANT. I COULD CARE LESS.

HOLD ON--

I DIDN'T START ALL THIS UP, YOU KNOW.

MY HUSBAND, THIS WAS HIS BABY. HE WAS MORE THE MISCHIEVOUS TYPE. LOVED TAKING POLITICIANS AND CELEBRITIES DOWN A NOTCH. FUNNY GUY.

ANYWAY, HE WAS TAKING FLYING LESSONS. SOMETHING WENT WRONG.

NOTHING HEROIC, I KNOW. BUT I KEEP THE LIGHTS ON HERE FOR HIM.

YOU'LL FORGIVE ME, BUT--

DID YOU NOTICE NOT ONE OF THEM MENTIONED ALL OF YOUR FRIENDS THAT *HAVEN'T* GOTTEN UP OUT OF THEIR GRAVES YET?

THIS GENERATION... THEY *LOVE* THEIR CYNICISM, DON'T THEY?

THEY CAN'T WAIT TO TELL YOU HOW UNAFFECTED THEY ARE BY EVERYTHING AROUND THEM...

BUT YOU AND I BOTH KNOW THEY *NEED* THESE STORIES.

THEY WANT TO BELIEVE THERE ARE PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO CAN BEAT ANYTHING-- EVEN *DEATH.* THEY'LL NEVER GET SO NUMB THAT IT WON'T MOVE THEM SOMEWHERE INSIDE.

SO WHEN THEY CAME TO ME WITH THIS, I FIGURED, HEY, WE'RE JUST GIVING THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY NEED. THEIR OWN GODS, THEIR OWN MYTHS.

AND I WAS *FINE* WITH ALL THAT-- I WAS--UNTIL *YOU* SHOWED UP, AND I REALIZED--

YOU'RE *OLDER* THAN ME. I MEAN, YOU'D NEVER KNOW LOOKING AT US, BUT STILL-- IT'S TRUE, ISN'T IT?

YES.

WOW. MEN AND WOMEN WITH SUPER-POWERS, DOING GREAT DEEDS, SAVING LIVES--AND LIVING FOREVER. YOU'RE *INCREDIBLE.* ALL OF YOU.

BUT YOU AIN'T HUMAN, SISTER.

AGING, MORTALITY-- *THAT'S* WHAT DEFINES PEOPLE LIKE US.

ALL THIS TALK ABOUT CLOSURE AND LOSS, THAT'S CERTAINLY SAD STUFF, BUT IT'S NOT THE *REAL* TRAGEDY OF IT ALL, IS IT?

"IT'S THAT WHEN YOU CROSS THE LINE--WHEN YOU BREAK THE RULES OF LIFE AND DEATH--YOU SACRIFICE SOMETHING A LOT *BIGGER* THAN THAT.

"YOU DON'T GET TO *BE* HUMAN ANYMORE. NOT ENTIRELY. NOT REALLY. BECAUSE WE NEEDED YOU TO BE SOMETHING GREATER.

"AND THAT STRIKES ME AS A HEAVY PRICE--HEAVIER THAN DYING, EVEN--FOR YOU TO PAY--

"JUST TO INSPIRE US."

THE UNEXPECTED TRUTH

PHOTOS | ABOUT | LINKS

AVENGERS SMASHED BY HULK IN BRAZIL?

CANADA, ALPHA FLIGHTED?

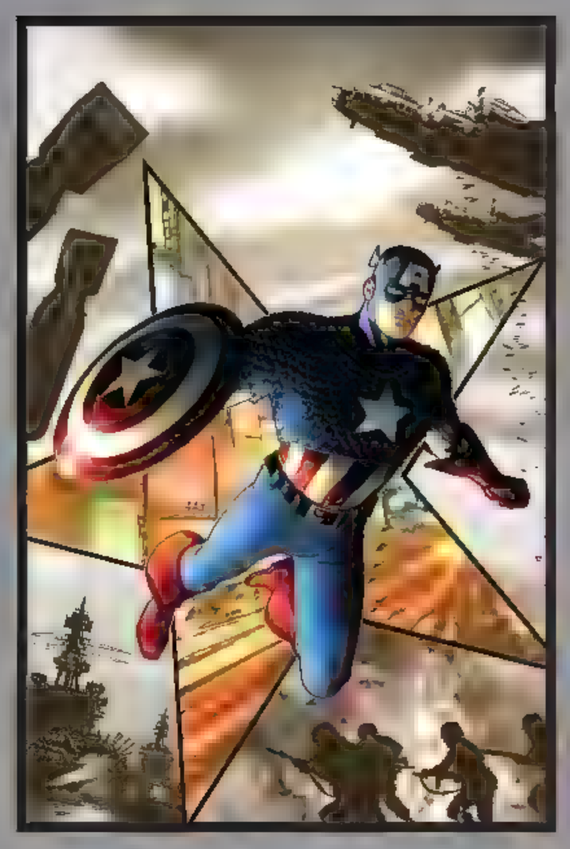
THING STORMS NYC!

NICK SPENCER WRITER

THIS POST HAS BEEN DELETED

FIN

NEXT ISSUE!



CAPTAIN AMERICA #1
AMERICAN DREAMERS!

HEROES FOR HIRE #9
FEAR ITSELF!

AVENGERS #15
RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE!

SECRET AVENGERS #16
SECRET AGENT MEN!

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FEAR ITSELF™

THE BLACK WIDOW®

BUNN NGUYEN YEUNG HAMSCHER GANDINI

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FEAR ITSELF

BLACK WIDOW

The Serpent—an ancient god of fear—has returned to Earth. With it, he has brought seven hammers giving hideous, untold powers to the wielder. Among the worthy is Grey Gargoyle, whose ability to turn people to rock was multiplied a thousandfold, and with it he turned Paris, the city of lights, and all her inhabitants into a city of stone.

The world has been thrown into chaos, but not all threats come from the heavenly realm...

...but that's okay. Not all heroes are worried about getting into heaven...

Natasha Romanov, a.k.a., The Black Widow, certainly isn't.

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Marseille

<("ISN'T IT FUNNY HOW *FATE* WORKS?*)

*TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH.

<("ALMOST AS IF IT RESPONDS TO THE...I DON'T KNOW...THE *ZEITGEIST* OF THE POPULACE.)

<("MY EMPLOYERS WANT TO SPREAD FEAR...)

<("AND FEAR BLOSSOMS--ACROSS THE WORLD--LIKE A FIELD OF POPPIES.")

<AND OF ALL THE PEOPLE WHO MIGHT TRY TO STOP US...THEY SEND *YOU*.)

<THE BLACK WIDOW...)

<BELIEVE ME WHEN I SAY MY EMPLOYERS WILL BE ESPECIALLY PLEASED TO MEET YOU, MY DEAR.)

<‹SO, IT *MUST* BE FATE, NO?›

<‹PERHAPS SHE HAS NOTHING TO SAY TO YOU, LAURENT.›

<‹I WONDER IF SHE MIGHT SPEAK TO ME. I WONDER IF SHE EVEN REMEMBERS.›

<‹FOUR YEARS AGO IN BELIZE. TWO YEARS AGO IN BEIJING. LAST YEAR IN BERLIN.›

<‹YOU'VE MEDDLED IN THE AFFAIRS OF MY ORGANIZATION FAR TOO OFTEN...SPOILED TOO MANY EXPENSIVE OPERATIONS FOR US TO REMAIN *NAMELESS ENEMIES.*›

<‹SURELY, YOU SEE ME AS A *RESPECTED ADVERSARY*... SOMEONE WORTHY OF A FEW LAST WORDS.›

NO?

VERY WELL.

LAURENT?

‹GOODBYE, BLACK WIDOW.›

BLAM

SIX HOURS EARLIER.

THIS IS FAR ENOUGH, PEREGRINE.

GET LOST...BUT STAY CLOSE.

TEN MINUTES TO EXTRACTION.

SO SOON?

I'VE GOT PLACES TO BE.

I'M *WASTED* HERE.

WHETHER HE'LL ADMIT IT OR NOT, ROGERS NEEDS ME...NOW MORE THAN EVER.

WITH EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE WORLD, IT'S AMAZING WE EVEN PICKED UP *CHATTER* ABOUT THIS OPERATION. OUR ENEMIES WERE PROBABLY COUNTING ON US OVERLOOKING IT.

RESOURCES ARE STRETCHED THIN RIGHT NOW.

AT LEAST, THAT'S ROGERS' EXCUSE FOR SENDING *ME* HERE.

I KNOW BETTER.

I KNOW HE THINKS THAT-- AFTER WHAT HAPPENED IN WASHINGTON--I'M NOT ON MY GAME.

I KNOW HE THINKS I'M A *LIABILITY.*

HE THINKS I'LL LET MY *EMOTIONS* TRIP ME UP IF I'M TOO CLOSE TO THE PRIMARY THEATER OF WAR.

BUT I'VE BEEN RUNNING OPS... LOSING FRIENDS... FOR A LONG TIME.

I'VE LEARNED TO PLAY THE ROLE OF MY NAMESAKE VERY WELL.

COLD.

EFFICIENT.

RUTHLESS.

ALL CLEAR UP HERE.

A .22 IS NOT THE MOST POWERFUL HANDGUN, BUT WITH A SILENCER, IT BARELY MAKES A WHISPER.

AND I'M TARGETING THE "*APRICOT*"--THE SNIPER'S SWEET SPOT--SO THEY'RE DEAD BEFORE THEY CAN SO MUCH AS GASP.

IN LIGHT OF WHAT'S HAPPENED IN PARIS, HALF THE PEOPLE IN MARSEILLE ARE EVACUATING, FLEEING FROM A POPULATION CENTER. OTHERS SOUGHT THE SOLACE...THE HOPE...THAT CAN ONLY BE FOUND IN CHURCH.

THESE POOR SOULS SIMPLY PICKED THE WRONG PLACE OF WORSHIP.

OVER A DOZEN TERRORISTS--WELL-TRAINED MERCENARIES, IF THE INTEL'S ON POINT.

WHOEVER THEY ARE... WHATEVER THEY'RE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH...THEY'RE USING THE PANIC GRIPPING THE CITY TO FURTHER THEIR AGENDA.

THEY SEE THE CHAOS...THE LOSS OF LIFE...AS NOTHING MORE THAN OPPORTUNITY KNOCKING.

GGGGKK--

I CAN'T RISK RESCUING THE HOSTAGES.

THE COMMOTION WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY ALERT MY TRUE TARGETS.

PEREGRINE... I'M GOING TO NEED AN ASSIST.

YOU NEED BUT SAY THE WORD.

THERE ARE SOME CIVILIANS IN THE CATHEDRAL WHO ARE IN NEED OF A *MIRACLE.*

ON MY MARK.

AN ANCILLARY MINISTRY OF DEFENSE OPS ROOM HIDDEN IN THE BASEMENT OF THE CATHEDRAL...ONE OF MANY HIDDEN IN VARIOUS PLACES THROUGHOUT FRANCE... READY TO SPRING INTO ACTION IN CASE THE CAPITAL IS COMPROMISED.

BUT THEY COULDN'T HAVE ANTICIPATED THE CURRENT...*MADNESS*...

...AND THEY OBVIOUSLY DIDN'T EXPECT TO BE *INVADED.*

‹WOULD YOU LOOK AT THIS?*›

‹I HAVE SEEN SOME TERRIBLE THINGS IN MY DAY, BUT THIS...›

*TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH.

2PM

‹THIS IS A WORK OF A TRUE MASTER!›

‹AN ENTIRE CITY TURNED TO STONE!›

<NO WONDER OUR TIMETABLES SHIFTED, HUH? NO WONDER OUR EMPLOYERS ARE IN SUCH A RUSH!>

<IF THEY WAIT MUCH LONGER, THERE WON'T BE ANYTHING LEFT OF THE WORLD TO TERRORIZE!>

<THE DATA TRANSFER IS ALMOST COMPLETE.>

T-TINK-TINK

EH?

SFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFF

<TEAR GAS!>

<C-CAN'T SEE!>

<MY EYES!>

<MASKS! PUT YOUR MASKS ON!>

THE GAS IS A SPECIAL CONCOCTION.

NOT ONLY DOES IT BLIND ANYONE NOT WEARING PROTECTIVE GEAR, IT ELICITS A DISORIENTING EFFECT, NOT UNLIKE BEING DRUNK.

THE HOSTAGES WILL HAVE A ROUGH TIME WITH THE GAS...BUT SO WILL THEIR CAPTORS.

IN THE END, THE HOSTAGES WILL BE NAUSEOUS FOR A WHILE AND THEY'LL HAVE WHAT FEELS LIKE THE WORST HANGOVER OF THEIR LIFE FOR A FEW DAYS...

THE TERRORISTS WON'T BE SO LUCKY.

WHACK

THUNK

UNF!

OOOF!

<WHAT THE--->

<COME ON!>

<WHAT ABOUT THE HOSTAGES?>

<MAKE IT QUICK.>

<QUICK, YOU SAY?>

RRR-RAAASH

<I THINK I CAN ACCOMMODATE YOU!>

AAGHH!

ZZAP

YEARRGH!

THE BOSS IS A KNOWN QUANTITY. I'VE SEEN HIS FILE.

RAPIDO. CUTTHROAT MERCENARY WITH CYBORG ENHANCEMENTS.

NO ONE PLAYS FAIR THESE DAYS.

CHK-BRAKKA-BRAKKA-BRAKKA-BRAKKA

HEH HEH HEH!

<HOLD STILL, LITTLE SPIDER, AND I'LL MAKE THIS *PAINLESS!*>

CHH-BRAKKA-BRAKKA-BRAKKA-BRAKKA

RAPIDO, RIGHT?

CAN'T DODGE THIS KIND OF FIREPOWER FOREVER. HAVE TO GET IN CLOSE...WHERE HE DOESN'T HAVE A SHOT.

YOUR GIRLFRIEND GIVE YOU THAT NAME?

HNNNF!

EAAAGH!

DID THEY SUCCEED?

THE EQUIPMENT'S RUINED. WE'LL HAVE TO ASSUME THEY DID.

AND IF THEY DID, WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR A LENGTHY INVESTIGATION. WE'LL HAVE TO GET WHAT WE NEED THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY.

I KNOW THIS MAN. HE WON'T BREAK EASILY.

WE'LL SEE.

WHERE DID YOU SEND THOSE CODES?

<GET OUT OF MY FACE BEFORE I BITE YOUR NOSE OFF!>

MAYBE PEREGRINE'S RIGHT. MAYBE YOU ARE TOO TOUGH TO BREAK.

BUT I WONDER ABOUT YOUR FRIEND.

WHERE?

RAPIDO AND HIS GOONS WERE JUST HIRED MERCENARIES...THIEVES AFTER A VERY SPECIFIC AND VERY DANGEROUS PAYLOAD.

THE REAL THREAT IS HERE...ON BOARD THIS SHIP.

THEY WERE AFTER THE FRENCH EQUIVALENT OF AMERICA'S *NUCLEAR FOOTBALL.*

THEY WANTED THE LOCATIONS OF FRANCE'S MISSILES... THE LAUNCH CODES...

THEY WANTED THE ENTIRE COUNTRY'S NUCLEAR ARSENAL.

WITH IT, THEY COULD RAIN FIRE ALL ACROSS THE WORLD.

RIGHT NOW, THE WORLD HAS ENOUGH PROBLEMS.

AT THIS POINT, THOUGH, INTEL IS NONEXISTENT.

I DON'T KNOW WHO I'M DEALING WITH OR WHAT THEIR INTENTIONS MIGHT BE.

I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH TIME I HAVE BEFORE THEY PULL THE TRIGGER ON ONE--OR ALL-- OF THOSE MISSILES.

I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT KIND OF DEFENSES I'M UP AGAINST--

UNNGH!

WHUMP

NOW.

‹WELL?›

‹WILL THIS WORK?›

‹OF COURSE IT WILL.›

‹YOU HIRED THE BEST FOR A REASON, DIDN'T YOU?›

‹VERY WELL. MAKE PREPARATIONS FOR A STRIKE AGAINST LONDON.›

‹WAIT...›

‹YOU'RE *REALLY* GOING TO LAUNCH AN ATTACK?›

‹THAT MAKES LITTLE SENSE, GENTLEMEN, IF YOU DON'T MIND ME SAYING SO.›

‹WE HAVE THE CODES...YOU COULD STAGE AN ATTACK WHENEVER YOU WANT... THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE WORLD WILL BE *AFRAID* OF YOU NOW.›

<WE'RE NOT IN THE BUSINESS OF FEAR, LAURENT.>

<WE'RE IN THE BUSINESS OF *TERROR.*>

<BUT SOMEONE HAS BEATEN US AT OUR OWN GAME.>

<IF WE DON'T SHOW THE WORLD THAT WE'RE A LEGITIMATE THREAT ***NOW,*** WE MAY NEVER GET THE CHANCE.>

<AND WE PAID YOU TO ORGANIZE RETRIEVAL AND ACTIVATION OF THESE CODES...NOT TO QUESTION OUR PLANS.>

<VERY WELL.>

<DO IT.>

<IS THAT WHAT THIS WAS ABOUT?>

<SOME SENSELESS EXTREMIST ATTACK?>

<ARE YOU REALLY THAT AFRAID THAT NO ONE WILL EVER NOTICE YOU... THAT YOU'LL REMAIN A NAMELESS NOBODY?>

<WHAT THE--->

<DON'T WORRY. YOU'RE NOT HEARING A GHOST.>

*<THIS IS A **LIFE MODEL DECOY,** DESIGNED TO PROTECT HIGH PROFILE INDIVIDUALS FROM ASSASSINATION.>*

<I APPROPRIATED THIS ONE FOR MISSIONS JUST LIKE THIS.>

<OF COURSE, THIS ONE WAS OUTFITTED WITH LISTENING DEVICES SO I COULD MAKE SURE YOU WERE ALL IN THE SAME PLACE...>

<...A TRANSMITTER, SO I COULD SAY GOODBYE...>

<...AND ENOUGH EXPLOSIVES TO TURN EVERY LAST ONE OF YOU INTO NOTHING BUT A BAD MEMORY.>

<WHAT'S THE MATTER?>

<DON'T YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY TO SUCH A "RESPECTED ADVERSARY"?>

KWA-BOOM

I HAVE TO ADMIT...

...UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, THIS MIGHT SEEM LIKE *OVERKILL.*

NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD BE NICE RIGHT ABOUT NOW.

WILL YOUR COMMANDER ROGERS AGREE WITH YOUR COURSE OF ACTION?

WASN'T HIS CALL.

THIS WAS *MY* OPERATION.

WELL, AT THE VERY LEAST, YOU'VE SAVED THE LIVES OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE.

THAT'S A VICTORY WORTH CELEBRATING!

IF THAT'S THE CASE, PEREGRINE...

...THEN WHY DOES IT FEEL SO HOLLOW?

FEAR ITSELF: BLACK WIDOW

CULLEN BUNN	PETER NGUYEN	VERONICA GANDINI	VC'S CLAYTON COWLES	CHARLIE BECKERMAN	RALPH MACCHIO	AXEL ALONSO	JOE QUESADA	DAN BUCKLEY	ALAN FINE
WRITER	ARTIST	COLORS	LETTERS & PRODUCTION	EDITOR	SUPERVISING EDITOR	EDITOR IN CHIEF	CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER	PUBLISHER	EXEC. PRODUCER

FEAR ITSELF
BOOK FOUR: WORLDS ON FIRE

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